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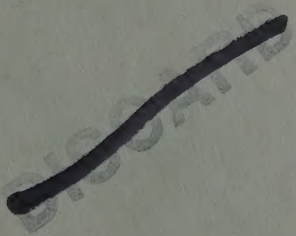

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The Story of Julia Page
The Treasure
Saturday's Child
Poor, Dear Margaret Kirby
The Rich Mrs Burgoyne

Mother

These I Like Best

THE FAVORITE NOVELS AND STORIES OF

Kathleen Norris

CHOSEN BY HERSELF

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN AND COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK 1941

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FIRST EDITION

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Introduction	vii
Little Ships	5
Barberry Bush	303
Mother	567
Rising Water From *Poor, Dear Margaret Kirby*	631
The Kelly Kid From *The Callahans and the Murphys*	651
Grand Central Pickup From *Baker's Dozen*	669
Sinners From *Baker's Dozen*	687
Masterpiece From *Baker's Dozen*	705
Beauty in Letters From *Baker's Dozen*	723

INTRODUCTION

My first book *was published just a little less than thirty years ago. Its appearance marked, of course, a tremendous moment in my life. It was displayed with the other books of the year in bookstore windows, and I wheeled a baby carriage past those windows and stood enraptured, looking at the dark blue cover and the neat little box on which the single word "Mother" was stamped. I felt then, as every writer of a first book feels, that I could never produce another book. Whatever I had to give had been poured into this book; I was spent. There were no more plots, characters or climaxes for me.*

When, just as soon as I could put a fresh ribbon in my shaky old first typewriter and secure a fresh box of tempting, untouched, perforated yellow paper, and the second novel began to take definite shape in my mind, I had the same feeling. Saturday's Child *brimmed with fascinations for me while I was writing it; I spared nothing. I saved no favorite scene or situation for the possible next book; there never would be another. If what I felt was a gem of philosophic thought came to me, or a glint of humor, or a remembered treasured experience from my own girlhood—naturally much used in constructing that of Susan Brown—I put it in. When* Saturday's Child *was finished I felt drained and done. Two novels. My reputation must rest upon the short one and the long one for a long time.*

Promptly the tide began to come in again. As spontaneously as if I had never written a line I began Julia Page. *Nothing else was in my head, to be sure; there were great blank spaces of complete nonproduction beyond Julia. But here she was, an ambitious little slum actress in San Francisco, and her story must run its three hundred and forty pages like the rest, and until it was finished I knew the deep content familiar only to the person immersed in story writing.*

On these three books and the short stories that followed them I learned a lesson that has been true of my own experience ever since. There is always one more story. Not two, not five buzzing about in one's mind,

but just the essential one, that until it is written seems the best of the lot. There is no new story; there is no outworn one. Any writer today may take the plot of Romeo and Juliet *or any Chaucerian tale, and change its clothes and change its locale, and if he handles it expertly enough we are pleased. We know its parentage, but admiring its forebears does not mean that we dislike the child.*

Victorian literature contains a thousand standard tales that have to do with unjust or stolen wills, with primogeniture, with the sorrows of youth and beauty condemned to marry age and wealth. David Copperfield is the grandfather of Peter Stirling; Richard Carmody *and* Of Human Bondage *and* The Citadel *are all of one blood; Jane Eyre, if to the formidable Rochester she ever bore a child, must have named that child Rebecca.*

My own literary ancestors are those prolific, not-too-important writing folk upon whose works I battened through all the happy years of a country childhood. Shakespeare, Dickens, Jane Austen were far above my head, but there were lesser lights, and I sat at their feet. Trollope, Charlotte M. Yonge of the big families and domestic joys and sorrows, Rosa Nouchette Carey of Queenie's Whim *and* Uncle Max, *these were my daily food.*

But these were not all. We who grew up in a small house in the heart of a redwood forest must have swept, I believe, through three hundred books a year. We ranged furiously from Macaulay's England *to* Dotty Dimple's Cousin Prudy. *We read Newman's* Apologia *and Mrs Craven's* Recit d'une Soeur. *We raked books off the shelves by the dozen and hauled them along on picnics, to haylofts, up oak trees, to bath and to bed. The one terrifying possibility was to find oneself without a book. My father put* Othello *or* The Tempest *into his pocket when he took us off for a Sunday walk; and although my mother religiously burned* Nick Carters *wherever she found them, she was invariably too late. Dinner-table talk was of books, and one sister, later to marry the poet William Rose Benét, saved herself the trouble of making a poetry collection, as the rest of us did in blank books, by simply memorizing everything she liked, once and for all.*

It was natural then, in a day when there were no motorcars and no movies, that we six who were so early orphaned should gather around a lamp in the evenings, and that one of us should be the storyteller. For whole years of winter evenings this was my proud responsibility. If the tale grew too sophisticated for some small sleepy member of the group

it was steered away, to the best of my ability, to simpler and more amusing regions. When some voice said, "Have a murder in it," or "What did they have for dinner?" or "Didn't she have any bridesmaid?" I strove to oblige.

So now, when I am faced with the task of selecting from the long row of sixty-five novels and some two hundred short stories those that will compose this book, I am following the same rule. These are all favorites—little ships, indeed, but little ships whose voyages have brought me great happiness. It is a renewed happiness to bring them into harbor after long sailing and launch them forth again upon the seas that have always been such friendly seas to me.

KATHLEEN NORRIS

LITTLE SHIPS

INTRODUCTION

LITTLE SHIPS *is the longest novel I ever wrote except one; it was never serialized, and so missed the large audience of magazine readers, and is my first favorite among all the books I ever have written. These three reasons seem to me good ones for including it here. It is autobiographical only to the extent that it deals with the sort of men and women and children I used to know; the atmosphere and background that were mine. The scene, therefore, had to be that of old San Francisco, before the fire of 1906 that burned down the Spanish houses on Nob Hill, laid in a heap of ashes the fascinating mysterious tangles of black doorways, subcellars, gratings and high balconies that were Chinatown and ravaged the quiet tree-shaded streets of the "Mission." The people are Irish-Americans, living the simple, emotional, united life of a big family, with its easy laughter and tears, its deep everyday faith, its abiding goodness and mutual love. It is a world that has almost vanished now; I should be happy to think that I had captured some of its charm for readers who remember it as I do.*

CHAPTER I

It was the last hour of the long three days' "Retreat" in the old Mission Convent of St Elizabeth, in San Francisco; Mollie Cunningham had almost exhausted herself with prayer. She could still kneel, almost sitting on her heels as she did so; she could still keep devout eyes upon the sunshine-flecked, candle-lighted, smoke-veiled haze of flowers and golden colors that was the chapel altar. But she was weary, smiling dreamily, like a tired child unnoted in the corner of a father's room. Benediction was in progress.

Her final prayer, so accustomed as to rise to her lips automatically now, was for the children.

Mollie had five living children "and two angels." Sown in among the joyous healthy cares and joys of her motherhood were the agonies of a double loss. George, taken from her after only a few wailing weeks of life, would be seventeen now. Daisy, a silken-headed blossom of three, had died ten years ago. The world had forgotten everything except that, vaguely, there had been a Cunningham baby or two who had not lived. But Mollie kept George's and Daisy's anniversaries ever green in her heart. "I hope they pray for Mama!" she often said.

She turned her thoughts today to the others—the five sturdy, bold, and black-eyed children who remained.

For Tom, twenty-two years old and the first-born, her prayers were filled with fear and pride. Tom had graduated from the Santa Clara College, and was beginning his business career with Papa, in the big wholesale grocery firm of P. J. Cunningham & Co. Tom was everything that was wonderful, his mother thought; handsome, witty, good, with the voice of a seraph. But Mollie was a little afraid just now that he was beginning to fancy his pretty, giddy, penniless cousin, Kate Walsh.

"Don't let him marry Kate," was her somewhat vague prayer for him. "She's a good enough little thing, and my own half-brother's child, but I want that the boy should look higher than that—he'll be rich some day, and if he could, travel in Europe, and then maybe come home and be his Mama's boy."

Cecilia came next in line. Cecilia, just nineteen, was kneeling beside her mother, her slender little back very straight, her white chip hat, wreathed with pink roses, bowed devoutly over her linked fingers. Nineteen! Mollie could hardly believe that one of her little girls was nineteen, a grown-up young lady, talking about a religious vocation.

For Cecilia, in her own angelic little heart, was sure that she wanted

to become a nun, right here in the dear old convent where all her happy school days had been spent. Her father was distinctly opposed to this idea, and even Mollie, although she loved the nuns, and had a proud and tender feeling toward the pious aspirations of her good little daughter, was not quite ready to pray that Cecy should "enter."

She prayed instead that the child should be "guided." If a good marriage should come along, with some fine man, Mollie knew that she would be better pleased. "Not a poor struggling feller that had risen up from nothing, like Jawn Kelly," Mollie mused, but perhaps someone who would give the child a taste of better things, society and art, travel. "Or at least," thought Mollie, vaguely, "if she had a beau or two, that she'd know what she'd be doing in offering it all up, and becoming a Sister!"

Then came Martin, the third of the children, wild, clumsy, dirty, at fifteen—the odd member of the little group. His mother could not think of Martin as particularly interesting, let him do what he would with his life. Today she merely asked God to "make a good man of him," before her prayers reached little excitable Ellen, nine, whose fond father loved to say that bones and freckles and tears and temper and pug-nose and all, Ellen would turn into "a grand woman."

"If Ellen made a good marriage, and made it early," her mother thought. "Maybe with some older man—for she'll never have looks, that one! She'd no more make a nun than Mart would a priest, although I'd love to have one priest out of my three boys!"

But of Paul, the adored five-year-old, the baby of the family, Mollie knew herself not courageous enough to ask for a priest. Paul was her darling, the last baby, and the baby who had come so much after the others, after the loss of George and Daisy, after Tom was a "big feller in college."

Paul must always be his mother's boy; she would carry him in her arms past all the sorrows and uglinesses of life, if she could. Tom had already shocked her with a coarse schoolboy joke, a coarse schoolboy attitude, now and then, and Cecy more than once, in the years before this present religious stage of her development had commenced, had read some book disapproved by her mother.

But Paul—no! The baby purity of her last-born child was strangely dear to Mollie, and today she prayed that Paul might never in the course of all his life commit a mortal sin.

The tears were in her eyes when the organ began softly to send the strains of the "Laudate Dominum" through the warm, sweet air, and everybody stood up, with great rustling and scraping. Two hundred women, worldlings and nuns, got to their feet, and stood facing for a few minutes the little altar with its candles twinkling bravely in a blaze of baffled afternoon light.

Sunlight was battering against the drawn shades of the western windows. It was warm in the chapel, and the air was sweet and heavy with lilies. The big Paschal candle was lighted, but there was no breath of

air moving to stir the tiny, ineffectual flame. The walls were of polished golden oak, the pews of golden oak, and the altar rail. The shining wood, the lights, the spotless order seemed to capture a sort of unearthly radiance, here in this little prayerful oasis in the very heart of the city.

The souls of the praying women were quite drenched with its beauty, their simple hearts were filled to the brim with felicity, as the twinkling monstrance was raised, and the thick, sweet, choking incense drifted in great blue clouds from the censer. They stumbled to their feet for the "Laudate" quite bewildered with exaltation.

From the rear came the straining notes of a tiny organ, the feeble voices of several nuns. St Elizabeth's had no fine voice this year, like dear Sister Gertrude's last year. How that heavenly voice had inspired them all in many a wonderful retreat!

Mollie Cunningham sat back upon the hard narrow seat with some creaking of stays, some audible shortness of breath. Mollie was stout. She glanced sidewise, with a significant smile at Cecilia's still bowed head, at her own sister, Maggie Walsh. Maggie had made the retreat, as well as a busy dressmaker could, with Mollie and Cecilia.

Well, it was over. Tonight they would have still to keep silence, of course. There would be Mass here at the convent tomorrow morning at eight, and afterward a jubilee breakfast, when the silence would be broken at last. But the retreat was practically over.

Mrs Cunningham and her sister Maggie Walsh tried to make the retreat every year. This was the first time Cecilia had been with them. She had been a schoolgirl at this time last year. The presence of Cecilia's pure youth and beauty in these three solemn days of lectures, prayers, and spiritual reading had been a great joy to her mother and her aunt, and according to the nuns, an "edification" to others as well. More than one devout woman, moving thoughtfully down the garden paths, at "recreation," had smiled significantly at Mollie. "That lovely little Cunningham girl has got a vocation!" the whisper went round.

Cecilia had, at all events, made a good retreat. There was something unearthly about her "recollection." She had listened to the lectures, read a book about Lourdes, the "Little Flower," and Montalembert's "Saint Elizabeth"; she had been the first to reach the chapel, the last to leave. Almost invariably her mother had had to await her lovingly, as she was awaiting her now.

The chapel slowly emptied. The delicate rustling of silks, and the chip-chip of women's feet, and certain subdued whispers, could be heard in the hall. These worldly visitors knew that the smooth convent routine was claiming the nuns again, as a clear bell struck three times, and was silent, in some place unseen.

"Sister Bertrand!" breathed Maggie Walsh, who prided herself upon her intimate knowledge of things conventual. Three bells was for Sister Bertrand, was it? Mrs Cunningham answered, with a serious nodding of her head.

Her big deep bosom, in its heavy silk, rose and fell upon a sigh. If Cecilia would but end her orisons, her mother reflected innocently, they would get downstairs in good season, and scores of retreatants would see the Cunninghams getting into their motor-car. Few women had automobiles waiting for them.

The sunset blazed angrily against the drawn shades. A street-car whined by, the motorman's bell ding-donging, and a light sunset wind sang in a hot minor key about the big building.

Almost everybody had left the chapel, a nun was practising on the organ, some other nun humming faintly in accord. One or two young postulants, with sober, plain, ecstatic young faces, their braided hair showing through coarse black net veils, had slipped into their stalls and were praying; and poor Lizzie Prendergast, who was "scrupulous," was weeping into her gnarled red hands in a front pew. Everyone knew that Lizzie had wanted to become a nun thirty years ago, but her father wouldn't let her, and her mother had cancer. Now Lizzie at fifty, with a very passion for retreats, was "scrupulous," a tearful, grateful picker at the crumbs that fell from the children's table.

Mollie looked at Lizzie, and then at Cecilia's firm, sweet, fragrant youth, and a wave of gratitude flooded her heart. How beautiful life was to be for the child!

And as if Cecilia felt the motherly look, she suddenly sat back, smiled dewily and dazedly at her aunt and her mother, and they all came out together from the chapel. They went out the side door by the Joseph altar, glancing seriously at Lizzie as they came.

"Well for me if I had Lizzie Prendergast's record, when my time comes!" said Mollie, downstairs. "She's a saint if ever there was one!"

"Lizzie ain't the only one," said Maggie Walsh, with a glance at Cecilia, and a kindly smile. Maggie was lean, florid, shabby, gray, where her sister was plump, pale, richly dressed, and without a single gray thread in the thick black satin of her hair, yet the sisters were oddly alike in some subtle way, physically, and very close in spirit.

Cecilia looked quickly, deprecatingly, almost in protest, at her aunt, but her honest, lovely little face, with its blue eyes and black lashes, its healthy rosiness powdered with golden freckles, its small straight nose, wide mouth, and youthful, innocent brow, flushed happily.

She did not speak. Cecilia had moments, and this was one, of being extremely conscientious about keeping silence during these days. She did not even avail herself of the permission to discuss "spiritual matters, or those of necessity."

The women who were drifting down the big, clean oak stairs were, however, less self-controlled. They were murmuring of meditations, lectures and litanies, as they filtered away into the noise and dirtiness and glare of the May streets. The old Mission streets of San Francisco, in the grip of the western sun, looked soiled and dingy.

A little nun attended them to the doorway, and opened the big gray

door that gave upon a flight of wide gray steps into a bare, orderly garden. Her hands lost in her big sleeves, she stood smiling them out, without speaking. As the Cunningham party came down, another nun, tall and decisive in movement, swooped from an adjoining parlor, and spoke to them affectionately.

"You'll be prompt tomorrow, Mollie?" she said.

"Indeed I will, Sister Aloysius!" answered Mollie, glad to speak under such irreproachable auspices. "Indeed it's all I can do to get me little ger'rl out of the chapel at all!" she added, with a loving glance for the radiant Cecilia.

The nun looked at once wise and simple, merry and grave, as only nuns and children can look. She put her arm about the girl.

"Some day you'll give her to us to keep, Mollie," she prophesied, cheerfully. "Sister Veronica and I have had our eyes on her all these years. Indeed," the religious went on, seriously, "Good Mother was just saying that we've never had a retreat yet without at least one vocation!"

"It's been my intention, this whole retreat!" Cecilia said, in a sudden burst of emotion.

Her tone, all youthful faith and fire, filled her mother's eyes with tears.

"I don't know what her papa'd say, she's the very apple of his eye!" Mollie faltered.

"Ah, if Our Lord wants her, he'll have to give her to us!" the nun said, gaily.

"Indeed, *I'd* give her gladly," Mrs Cunningham said, stirred by a sudden feeling of her own. The peaceful days of prayer, the love she felt for this big school where some of her own happy young days had been passed, the sense of wealth and power her big waiting car—visible now at the gate—always gave her, impelled her toward some act of dramatic generosity. "We'll pray for it, Sister," she encouraged. "And while you're about it," she added, "you might pray that her father'll give you that big lot with her—he's not one to have her come to you empty-handed!"

She nodded her head as she spoke toward the big corner lot that bounded the convent property on the southwest. The thought had come full-fledged into being. Mollie had never before actually put together the two facts of Cecilia's vocation and her father's ownership of this particular piece of property.

She was a little frightened at her own daring, a little apprehensive, when she saw the sudden surprised expression in the nun's eyes.

"Mollie, does Mr Cunningham own that lot?" Sister Aloysius asked, quickly.

"He does indeed," Mollie answered, with an uneasy smile.

"Glory be to the everlasting goodness of God," said the nun, simply, in a low tone, her eyes rapt and her hand moving automatically in a blessing. "He knows better than ourselves what are our needs!" she said, as if to herself. "Mollie, may I tell Good Mother that,—just what you

have told me?" she asked, in an undertone, as other groups of women, coming out, moved about them. "She has been so concerned about larger quarters, and we hardly know which way to turn," she added. "We have been praying to 'soften the heart of whoever owned that big lot'," she ended, with a deeply humorous smile. "Little did we dream it was good Mr Cunningham!"

"Indeed you may!" Cecilia agreed, eagerly, for her mother.

Mollie experienced a horrible sensation of sinking within. The full potentialities of her indiscretion could not rush upon her at once, but she felt distinctly apprehensive.

"Well, will her papa ever give his consent that she should be a nun or not I don't know," she began, dubiously.

"About that," said the nun, leaving them with a smiling nod, "we must wait to discover the will of God!"

She was gone, and there was nothing for Mrs Cunningham to do but accompany her sister and daughter down to the waiting motor-car. Maggie had indeed preceded her, and was chatting subduedly with Agnes Haley, in the sunset's red light beside the automobile. Mollie thought, with annoyance, that maybe Agnes expected a lift home.

Agnes, however, departed hastily, remarking merely that she had to "get bread for Kitty," and the Cunninghams seated themselves upon the pale buff cushions and started for Maggie's home, the Walsh family homestead in Turk Street. But at Maggie's first word all the spiritual glow and peace departed from Mrs Cunningham's heart.

"Is Pete going to give the nuns that big lot if Cecilia goes in?" Maggie demanded. And Mrs Cunningham, nettled and disturbed, spent some moments in belittling the idea, with a fine air of negligence and indifference, and several more moments in analyzing mentally just what she had said to Sister Aloysius in that unfortunate moment of expansion and imagination.

"What possessed me!" she asked herself, in alternate panic and calm.

"Papa'd be a saint if he gave them that big lot!" Cecilia suddenly burst forth.

"I didn't say he would, I said he *might*," Mollie reminded her. "You better say nothin' about it——"

"Mother, if a person had a vocation, and kept putting it off, would they lose it?" the girl presently demanded.

"Not if they were very young, darling," her mother answered, tenderly.

"I'm nineteen," Cecilia offered, simply.

"You're a child," her mother assured her. Nineteen! Her little baby girl!

"Kate has a head on her like a man," Maggie Walsh put in, without warning, in her somewhat heavy, downright voice. Kate was an orphaned niece who lived with her, and there was a natural rivalry between the beautiful and protected Cecilia and the less fortunate Kate. Maggie was

always ready to speak in Kate's defence. "She passed the civil service examinations third out of forty-seven," stated Maggie.

This had occurred some months previously, and had been thoroughly discussed not once but a hundred times. So Mollie made no comment, and Cecilia, when she spoke, was miles away.

"Saint Julia Falconieri took her vows when she was only fourteen," she remarked, dreamily. Nobody spoke in answer.

The motor turned into drab streets lined with wooden houses, and stopped before the Walsh home, a grimy, gray, bay-windowed cottage with a half-flight of peeled, discolored steps rising from the street to the parlor floor, over basement windows and a garden path edged with inverted stout bottles.

There were geraniums upon jointed, shabby stalks, fuchsias, roses with speckled dry leaves, marguerites, in the garden and against the fence, and all along the neighboring fences was blown a sunburned litter of newspapers, chaff and rubbish, stirring restlessly now in the fitful wind.

The windows were draped with sodden Nottingham lace curtains, in the center pane was a large white card upon which was painted, in flowing black script, the words: *"Walsh. Modes."* Maggie carried on her dark and unsuccessful labors in the front parlor.

Mrs Cunningham's eyes, moving in some dissatisfaction over the familiar scene of what had been her own home many years before, detected another, smaller sign, over the bell. This was also familiar, but intermittent. It read *"Rooms and Board."*

"Did that feller go?" she asked, as one who knew and who felt a distaste for the answer.

Maggie nodded dispiritedly.

"We'll get another," she predicted, somewhat lifelessly. "Come in and see Ma, Mollie?"

"I can't, I've got to get home. I'll be in tomorrow," Mrs Cunningham answered, sighing. And Maggie, with no further attempt at persuasion, turned away.

"I guess Kate's home—I guess she's getting dinner started," said she, seeing lights in the rear windows. Cecilia had a shuddering vision of the scene within: its shabbiness, its sordidness, its poverty; the grizzled uncles waiting like big helpless seacows for their supper; the old grandmother dozing; Kate young and strong and beautiful, slamming plates and pots about.

Maggie, gray, grayly clad, middle-aged, disappeared in the gray twilight at the top of the dingy flight of gray stairs, and the Cunningham car moved briskly down the block, and turned, with a quite conscious brightening and quickening, toward the mellower airs, the prettier streets, the tree-shaded dooryards of the Mission.

Twilight was kindly here; there were big shaggy eucalyptus trees in the neighborhood, through which the last sunlight was sending soft,

warm colors; there were pampas grasses, roses, border pinks in the stately Cunningham garden.

The Cunningham mansion was set in handsome lawns, bulwarked some eight feet above the level of Howard Street by a substantial stone bulkhead. Through this bulkhead, in front, rose a flight of broad, easy steps from the street; on top of the bulkhead ran a pretentious fence of iron filigree against which nicely tended and watered bushes and shrubs were ranged.

Between them the cement path ran at an easy slant up to the house, a double house, with wide, comfortable bay windows on each side of the big, deeply vestibuled front door. The doorway was of mahogany, a fact that never escaped the proud consciousness of its owners as they came and went, and the glass in the bay windows was plate.

The mansion faced the southwest, and the last light lay against the heavily draped lace and rep curtains of the best parlor and the billiard room, and through upper bay windows penetrated into the pleasant big front bedrooms upstairs that were Mrs Cunningham's and the girls' rooms and into the little chapel, that was between them, directly over the front door.

For the sun lingered much later, and came much earlier, here in the Mission, and the last of its rays were just disappearing when Cecilia and her mother dismounted at the side door. The car, and the truculent old red-headed driver who was known only as "Kane," swept up the brick-paved driveway toward the stable quarters in the rear, and the Cunninghams, mother and daughter, went in the side door.

Within were immense space, richness, and comfort. Everything was orderly, darkened, quiet. Mollie Cunningham never got used to the joy of finding it so; Bessy, in her cap and apron, silently but smilingly admitting them, a card or two on the silver tray, a fire glowing in the living-room grate, and all the beloved rugs, carpets, curtains, heavily upholstered chairs, enormous, heavy tables, lamps, brass coal-buckets, immense framed pictures, life-sized statues of Neapolitan girls and white marble nymphs in Carrara veils, in place.

To tread the thick carpets was to walk in an enchanted land to her; to realize that prosperity, comfort, beauty reigned here, and that she reigned over it all, was an unceasing joy. She had almost a generous feeling of shame when her friends saw the house for the first time. If even to her it always seemed so marvelous, what must it be to unaccustomed eyes! When Mollie brought home a friend, from a Lenten lecture, or from the Francesca sewing society, she was always especially simple and informal; she moved through her house naturally and briskly, the friend might easily suppose her totally unconscious of its greatness.

But she was thrilling with the acute sense of it, nevertheless. And to her, as to all Cunninghams, the one subject never to be treated lightly, frivolously, or as a joke, was the house. What it had cost, what had inspired its general features, how long the building had taken, and what

the comments of press and public had been, when at last, upon its splendid eminence, it had been finished, were always fruitful and favorite themes of conversation. Mollie Walsh Cunningham had been a poor girl, a school-teacher. Peter Cunningham, reaching New York via the steerage, at seven, had known bitter years of want and discouragement before drifting westward to prosperity, his wife, his home, and his present position.

Tonight there was apparently nobody downstairs except the light-footed Bessy, who disappeared immediately into her own region of large silver tea-pots, tick-tocking clocks, and dining-room gloom. Mrs Cunningham, loosening her bonnet-strings as she went, mounted the immense, square stairway that was lighted by a high, colored window, and yawned unaffectedly.

A little girl of nine, thin, babyish, and homely, came down the stairs to meet her mother, by a tortuous process of crab-like movements, her thin arms hooked over the wide balustrade and her feet caught in between the columns of it.

"I ain't touchin' the ground a-tall!" this child announced, shrilly, without a glance at her mother, toward whom her hooped little back was indeed completely turned. Her straight, lifeless hair was drawn over her outstanding ears in two lanky pigtails, and her face, as Mrs Cunningham captured her, and restored her position to the normal, was flushed and protestant.

"Don't do that, Ellen dear, you'll get yourself giddy!" the mother said, indulgently disapproving.

"Aw—I was haffway down—aw, I can do it better than Baby!" shouted Ellen, in an ear-piercing voice.

"Oh, for heaven's *sake,*" Cecilia murmured, passing her mother and sister with only one patient sigh, and going on to her own room.

"Are the boys home, lovey?" Mrs Cunningham asked her youngest daughter.

"Tom is," sing-songed Ellen, "Martin is—Martin was in a fight, and he bit Leo Kennedy, and Joe Kennedy said that Mart was a dirty sneak. And he *is* a dirty sneak, Mother," Ellen added with conviction, now hopping along beside her mother, with such occasional clutches at the stout, elderly form, as almost upset Mrs Cunningham's balance as well as her own. "You oughtn't bite boys when you fight them," ruled Ellen, eagerly. "Father Moran came out, and he saw them fighting, and he said that they were like the beasts of the field, and Rose Cahill and me ran home, and I guess he——"

"Did ye hear about the baby, Mollie?"

A gaunt, thin, haggard-eyed woman, with a perfectly colorless face dotted with large brown freckles, had intercepted their progress across the wide, twilight space of the upper hall. Her tone was indifferent, patient, resigned, and touched with a distinct whine.

"Between us and harm—what's happened?" demanded Mollie Cun-

ningham, her healthy color fading, and her full, soft hand clutching her own bosom, as all her maternal fears, never long dormant, sprang into throbbing life again. Her eyes roved apprehensively toward the nursery door, some feet behind her informant.

"Well, nothin'," hastily said the gaunt woman, with something like a faint apology in her tone, "but he run home from school—the size of him! Mindju, alone—he come flyin' in. I thought poor Annie would die on me with the shock!"

"The baby—he run them five blocks alone, and over the crossings—well, deliver us all!" Mrs Cunningham said, impressed. "The poor nuns must have been scared out of their wits when they missed him!" she said, in her large, splendidly furnished room now, and laying aside her formal attire. She began to button herself into a soft, baggy old blue sateen, figured in gray, with a high, hooked collar neatly finished with ruching, and enormous limp baggy sleeves.

"Oh, I sent Annie on the run up there, to tell them he was at home," the other woman said. She seated herself with a sigh, in a large chair, but without any effect of comfort or relaxation. Rather she perched upon its edge, holding her lean, flat body erect, as if duty might at any instant claim her. "Well," she said, sighing again, "I guess you're having a grand retreat."

The dreary tone died away into silence; Mrs Cunningham, if she heard, did not answer. Allie Cunningham, her husband's sister, was a natural fact in her life; no conversational effort was demanded by Allie. Mollie looked at her complacent, handsome self in the large mirror of the enormous walnut bureau, pinned upon her ample bosom, with a bow-knot of tiny pearls, a handsome gold watch; pulled the fingers of her gloves thoughtfully, and blew into them before laying them in a gray satin box upon which a pair of brown gloves, carelessly flung down, had been painted in oil.

All the furniture in the room was large: there were two tremendous walnut wardrobes, a washstand upon which stood a handsome china pitcher decorated in gold and colors, and the corresponding basin and cups and tooth-mug, a sewing-table, a whatnot, various chairs, one of them a patent rocker on a heavy pedestal, and an enormous bed, smoothly white, with a foot of machine-cut walnut, and a high back decorated in mill-work scrolls, with dots, dashes, slanting lines, leaves, wheels and scallops wherever they could be crowded in. Two flat thin pillows and two erect fat ones were at the head of the bed; it was flawless, plump, firm, it was a work of art, demolished and repeated daily.

At the windows were rep draperies drawn stiffly back in heavily tasseled bands, under which stiff Nottingham lace curtains were neatly arranged. All the curtains depended from great frames which in their turn were covered with rep and gimp. The floor was covered from baseboard to baseboard with beautiful Moquette, a pattern of roses and ribbon upon a pearly background.

Adjoining was a large, dark bathroom with a wooden lattice laid upon the floor beside the wooden-framed tin tub, for the safety and convenience of bathers, and a washstand of darkly mottled brown marble. There was a tall window in this bathroom, but against it the dark inside shutters were invariably drawn. Mollie Cunningham had been born in a home where running water in itself was a luxury; she and her husband had a bathroom in their new house, of course, indeed they had been much discussed by their own small circle when it was built, because they had two bathrooms. But in the twenty years of their tenancy here they had used it perhaps not quite as many times.

The handsome washstands, with their odorous soaps and fringed towels, the comforting pitcher of hat water, the sense of compactness and normality, were nearer the ideal of both, where ablutions were concerned, than was this roomy apartment with its tub, this necessity for complete disrobing, with its accompanying feeling of helplessness, of being caught at a disadvantage, this embarrassing redressing from the very beginning of shirt and stockings.

Mollie always "washed" at night, turning her clothes down over the tops of her corsets, soaping her fresh, full neck and rinsing and spattering conscientiously. And Pete puffed and blew, and groped for his towel, and soused his thick shock of grizzled black curls every morning. There was always much slopping and sputtering; the splasher behind the stand was always scarred with little flights of flying drops and the big slop-jar was usually filled and showed a floating scum of gray suds when Ida or Grace came in to clean the room at nine o'clock. But the bathrooms were principally for display; it was wonderful to have them, used or not.

And of course the young persons of the family did use them, or did use the one that opened out of the nursery. Cecilia had of late begun a quite noticeable fashion of bathing; odd nights, even occasionally in the mornings. Her brothers, content with Saturday-night scrubbings, somewhat joked her about it.

Mollie's closet was enormous, but she used the wardrobes by preference. The big room opposite hers was occupied by Cecilia and Ellen, the other children had large back rooms. Next her was the chapel, an interior room, between the two big front bedrooms, small, dark, impressive. There were two upholstered little benches and several *pries-dieu* placed neatly on the shining, slippery floor; there was a large crucifix half visible in the gloom; pictures, a small empty altar, gold candlesticks, and before a graceful, blue-wrapped statue of the Blessed Virgin a lighted wick floated in a red glass tumbler.

From the upper hallway a second large flight of stairs ascended. There were six rooms on this floor, and six more in the mansard above. Some of them on the third floor were unused, two or three unfurnished; the Cunningham children used to play about in them during rainy days, as proud as their parents were of the spacious emptiness and the superfluity of room.

CHAPTER II

While his mother was changing her street attire for dinner, Tom Cunningham, twenty-two years old, and the first-born, came loitering in. Tom had finished schooling with the Jesuits in Santa Clara, and was beginning work under his father in the family firm. He was everything an eldest son may, and should, be: handsome, merry, clever, good, devoted. Tom's father and mother sometimes said of him that they had never had a bad word or a dirty look out of him.

Tom was not unusually tall, as Mart, the fifteen-year-old brother was. But he was a good height, broad, dark, with thick black eyebrows, thick black curls covering his head like a close cap, dark, rich lashes, hard red cheeks, skin as white as a girl's, fine big teeth that showed when he laughed noisily, as he was always laughing, and square hands, hirsute and capable. He had a deep voice, a splendid laugh, and he could be funnier, the family thought, than any one else in the world.

"Hello, Mollie," he said, impudently, to his mother, kissing her milk-white forehead whence the black curly hair sprang thickly, still damp from recent dressing, "do you think you have the true vocation?"

"Hello, darlin'," responded his mother, mildly, her look of blind adoration tempered with anxious inspection. "Is Papa home?"

"He's downstairs. Ellen's bedeviling him into something. Well, are you still keeping the holy custody of the tongue, or can you talk to a feller?" asked Tom.

His mother and his aunt exchanged an indulgent look. Tom was a terror, said their proud eyes.

"Well, I can talk about matters of necessity or of holiness," his mother said, obviously quoting. Tom gave a shout of delight.

"Necessity or holiness—oh, my God!" he repeated, joyously.

"Don't talk that way, Tom," his mother protested. "You'd think you were mocking the nuns!"

"Well, Aunt Allie and I aren't strong on retreats, are we, Aunt Allie?" Tom said, sunk luxuriously into a chair, and watching his mother as she finished her toilette and closed bureau drawers.

"I don't know why we wouldn't be," Allie Cunningham said, with a deep sigh, and in a faintly resentful tone. "I don't know anything that would be grander," she added, enviously, "than to sit there at the Sisters', and have all the time in the world for your prayers and your own soul. I don't know—maybe I'll lose my own, in the end, if the truth was to be known," she rambled bitterly on, of her soul; "it's hardly time I have for my decade—I've lost my Crozier beads—— 'Do you think I wouldn't like to sit around with all you girls, doing nothin'?' I said to Ag Haley, after Mass on Sunday. 'Dear me, you must think I'm very fond of managin' to market, and quarrelin' with them the way they won't pass

off any high meat on me!' I says. 'I'm not so fond of runnin' Pete's house as all that.' Did you see Maggie, how is she?" concluded Aunt Allie, still in a dull monotone, and with no change of expression.

Mrs Cunningham had not been extremely attentive; she was reading a letter that had been placed upon her bureau. Tom was smoking a cigarette, and had picked up a magazine.

"The Sisters in Oakland are going to have an Easter Bazaar," said Mollie, with interest. "Yes, I saw Maggie, she come in for Benediction," she added. "She says Mrs Rose sent the children's dresses back on her, and says she won't take them. I never heard of such a thing!"

"For heaven's sake!" ejaculated Aunt Allie.

"Maggie says the material was spotted before she ever cut into it—they're lovely little dresses, and I don't know why children couldn't wear them very well, for school, with their coats," Mrs Cunningham reasoned, mildly. "You'd hardly see the spots—and you with an opera glass turned on them! Poor Mag, she has the bad luck," she finished, sighing and shaking her head.

"Well, I'd see she took 'em, and paid for them, or I'd have the police after her!" Miss Cunningham said, hotly. "There's never a child that doesn't spot a dress the first time it's on, anyway!" In Aunt Allie's character there were tremendous forces, denied and aborted, and always ready to rise. She tortured herself with angry dissertations as to what she would do were she a mother, were she a wife, were she a priest, were she the President or the Archbishop. She listened to sermons in physical quiet but with a boiling heart and a truculent eye. She cast an embittered glance at her brother, when he discussed the children's lessons, at the dinner-table; and to blooming and joyous Mollie, who had married this adored brother twenty-three years ago, she had directed a gnawing jealousy, a furious loyalty, and a nagging anxious criticism during all this long and vital time.

Nothing annoyed Aunt Allie as much as praise of Mollie and Mollie's children, unless it might be blame of them. Lean, unhappy, dyspeptic, she managed the house; fretting, carping, comparing, and envying, during serene and sunshiny days, but a veritable tower of strength and courage when calamity came. Aunt Allie was like a harp of one rich chord, and that chord was bereavement.

"Lissun, Mom, lissun," Tom said, aggrieved by her inattention.

"I am, darlin'," his mother assured him. "Go on, dear!"

"These pictures," Tom resumed an ignored theme readily, "they all run eight times slower, do you see? So that when a feller jumps into the bay, he just rises slowly up in the air like a bird—it's the darnedest thing! His arms sorter spread out—but the dog was the keenest! Lifting up one foot and then the other——!"

"For heaven's sake!" Mrs Cunningham said, absently. "I don't know how would they do that, unless they have the poor feller on ropes," she added, mildly.

"Oh, Mama, for God's sake!" Tom said, patiently. "Didn't I just tell you that all they do is run it slower?"

"Like the magic-lantern your papa gave Mart when he was thirteen," elucidated Aunt Allie, sepulchrally. "You could put two plates in!"

"No, not like that at all!" Tom ejaculated, almost in a shout. "You know as well as I do the films are on a sorter *spool*——"

"What would they have them on a spool for? Don't pitchers come on little glass slabs?" his mother asked, in genuine bewilderment, as he paused helplessly.

"Oh, Lord!" said Tom, dropping his elbows upon his knees, and sinking his black curly head in his hands. "Cis, tell Mom about the pictures we saw at the Orpheum," he requested, as his sister, with a small black book in her hand, came into the room.

Cecilia, fresh and trim, ready for dinner, her beautiful eyes dewy, smiled upon him gently.

"I'm in retreat, Tom," she reminded him, monitorially. And mildly and softly she said to her mother: "Mother, if Aunt Allie'll take me, might I go down to the Jesuits' tonight? They're having Vespers."

"Well, if your father doesn't mind——" Mrs Cunningham began, somewhat worried because Tom, with a snort, had abruptly left the room. "I should think, retreat or no retreat, you could speak a little more kind to your brother," she rebuked Cecilia, gently.

The girl's sensitive face flushed, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Well, but, Mother—not about the *Orpheum!*" she stammered. Reproach from her mother was rare enough to seem an actual calamity to Cecilia.

"I know, but you've got to think of your brother," Mrs Cunningham, weary and hurried, persisted, as she followed Tom. "If a boy's home isn't made attractive to him——"

She went out, and Cecilia said, in a little pettish burst, to Aunt Allie: "A person wants to become a nun, and give her *entire life* to God, and then their brothers act so selfish and worldly! Tom Cunningham will be sorry enough when I'm gone, and he only has Ellen to be his sister!"

"Indeed, the nuns have great trials of their own," said Miss Cunningham, unencouragingly. "There's many a one I've seen with red eyes on her! Don't think you can run away from the troubles of the world so easy, you'll find plenty everywhere! When I was eighteen"—she added in a high, sarcastic tone—"oh, indeed, I was going to enter, and it was all so easy and pleasant, and then my brother, your Uncle George, was took with cancer of the face, and my poor mother——!"

Aunt Allie sighed. No need to review the details; Cecilia had heard them a hundred times.

"No, I've given my life to my family—small thanks I get for it," she said, darkly. "But the girls that entered—they haven't had it all roses, either. A nun told me long ago, 'Alice,' she says, 'don't think we're any different just because we put on habits. Not at all, dear,' she says.

'Human hearts are just the same, and human faults, too!' I've often thought of her—she died soon after."

"Ah, Aunt Allie," said Cecilia, with her loving laugh, as she laid her blooming face for a moment against the leathery, colorless skin, and embraced her aunt with a slender arm, "you're so funny! Of course they're not any different, except that God sends them even *harder* trials than He sends people in the world; they *ask* for them. You don't think I want to enter to escape from *trials,* do you?"

"I don't believe your papa will ever consent that you should enter at all," Miss Cunningham suggested, unencouragingly. Cecilia laughed exultantly.

"He'd give me to the first rich young man that asked for me, fast enough!" she said, without resentment. "Pearl Ryan went in on New Year's Eve. Her father never knew a thing but what she was engaged to Stan Richards, and they were having a party, and the worst of it was that Stan and the two Ryan boys took too much punch——"

Miss Cunningham, descending the big stairs, was not listening. But Tom, who was close behind them, overheard the last phrases with relish.

"Well, it's too bad you couldn't mention the Orpheum, Cis," he said with a loud laugh, "because of keeping the retreat, and now here you are talking about the drunks at the Ryans' party last New Year's Eve. You've got a *grand* idea of charitable silence, I *must* say!"

He leaped upon his way. Cecilia was stricken dumb. She assumed an expression of frozen remoteness, and, entering the sitting room, took a slim blue volume from the table, and seated herself absolutely without speaking, at some distance from the family group.

Peter Cunningham, broad, grizzled, florid, with his curly black hair thinning in the very center of his bull-like round, hard head, was in a leather easy chair, with Ellen balancing uncomfortably upon the arm. Ellen, who customarily wore a round comb in her own lank, colorless locks, had removed it, and with it was combing and twisting her father's hair, her thin, homely, nervous little face absorbed and happy.

Mr Cunningham had removed his pull-on shoes, and had eased his weary feet into flat, comfortable carpet slippers. The shoes were waiting for Ida or Bessy to come and carry them away; meanwhile, Paul, the baby of the family, a golden-ringletted, lace-collared, heavy-looking child of five, was pushing them to and fro, one freighted with the Dresden china shepherd-girl and the other with the iron elephant paperweight.

"Choo-choo!" said Paul, in an absorbed undertone, guiding the shoes between the various adult feet. "St——arp!" he whined, as Tom rocked the train perilously, by pressing his own foot upon the tip of a toe. "Starp, Tom!"

"Don't tease him, darlin'," Mrs Cunningham, also in a chair, said, tenderly. "The less attention we pay——"

"There, now you look sweet, Papa!" Ellen exclaimed, suddenly, her concentrated expression relaxing as she leaned back to survey her work.

"You're a young lady, Papa, and your hair is all nicely fixed for a ball!"

"You've done me very proud, I don't doubt in the least, Miss Eileen Aroon," said her father, contentedly.

"No, but, Papa, you've got to get up and look!" Ellen assured him, with various pushes and shoves of her bony little arms and person against his great bulk. "Get up—you have to get up. Go on, Papa, get up and look in the mirror and see how I've done you!"

"Ah-h, deary—deary! I've got bones in my legs!" pleaded her father, making no move.

"Oh, but you *have* to!" Ellen said, in happy assurance. But as he merely slumped the more comfortably, and as Tom gave her a faintly negative shake of the head, and her mother emphasized it, her bright little face darkened into sulkiness, and there was a hint of quivering in the muscles about her mouth. "No, but he *has* to!" she said, stubbornly and angrily now. "You've *got* to!" she persisted, in tears.

"No, now leave Papa alone, he's tired after his hard day," Mrs Cunningham said, authoritatively. "It's very naughty of you to annoy him, and you're a silly baby to cry about it," she said, in disapproval.

"I hate everyone!" screamed Ellen from the doorway. "I hate you all! I wish I didn't belong to this horrid family! I wish I was dead!"

"Ah, no, darlin'—lovey, come back and be Papa's girl again!" said Peter Cunningham, laughing in sympathy and deep amusement, as she made her tempestuous exit. He continued to hold out a heavy arm and a hairy, freckled strong hand toward the door where she had disappeared. "She's the funny little miller's thumb,—she'll make a grand woman!" he added, contentedly, relapsing into his chair.

"Where's Aunt Allie?" murmured Mrs Cunningham to Cecilia, suddenly remembering that she was in retreat.

Cecilia said, "She had to see about something," with only neat little movements of her beautiful mouth.

"Cis can't talk, she's keeping the custody of the tongue," Tom said through set teeth, bending the fresh cigarette in his lips toward a match.

"Don't light that cigareet in here," his father commanded, quenching him. Cecilia's luminous and triumphant eyes came up from her book.

"Can't talk, hay, darlin'?" Peter went on, addressing his eldest daughter.

Cecilia smiled, all good nature again.

"If you'll talk about something holy, Papa," she stipulated, demurely, and she laid aside her book and went to get into his lap.

"Had enough of prayers, lover?" he asked, fondling her silken fineness with enormous paws. He bunched her rich thick hair off her face. "Them little arms is thickening, Mama," he said. "She's getting to be a real big girl."

"Nineteen," Cecilia reminded him, laying her warm, smooth rosy cheek, and her dark hair, against his forehead.

"You'll be setting up a beau, one of these days," the father predicted, fondly.

She was too young to let it pass. Cecilia raised her head and looked him seriously in the eyes, although she was smiling.

"Something better than that, Papa!" she said, lightly yet firmly.

A cloud came over the man's heavy, honest face.

"Don't want to go about to dances with Kate? Kate's your cousin, and she's a grand girl," Peter suggested, wistfully.

"Kate's a dear," Cecilia conceded, with her sweet, cool little smile. "But dances don't attract me, Papa."

"Well, there's Jawn Kelly," the father added, in spite of an unmistakable push from his wife's foot. "What about Jawn? He thinks the world and all of you——"

He looked at her anxiously, despite his bantering air. Cecilia laughed, and folded his big red ears into the grizzled curls above them as she had loved to do since baby days.

"John's a dear," Cecilia conceded again, laughing merrily. "And I'm sure I'm much obliged to him!"

"Jawn'll be head of the business when I'm gone," Peter told her.

"*Maybe*——" Tom interposed, with a grin.

"You," his father addressed him, with a look of annoyance. "You keep in with Daly, and the Riordan boys, in the shipping department," he advised his son, "and you'll keep your job, *maybe.*"

"Papa's only joking," Mrs Cunningham, surprised to see her husband actually scowling, said placatingly.

"Daly!" Tom muttered, now playing with Paul's small arms, windmill fashion, as the sleepy little fellow balanced upon his knees. "He's a grand old webfoot——"

The president of the company, with a darkening brow, returned his gaze to his daughter. But it was not anger at Tom that trembled in his voice as he said:

"So poor Jawn hasn't a chance against the nuns, eh?"

If Cecilia had but seen her mother's warning glance, and indeed maintained, to use Tom's phrase, the holy custody of the tongue! But she was too young, and too earnest, to note diplomatic considerations, and she answered gravely:

"Nobody has a chance, if something else is *right,* Papa."

A look his wife had seen before, but one with which his children were entirely unfamiliar, came into Peter Cunningham's face, a hard, cunning look, and he roused himself like an awakening lion, and sent a swift glance, from his small, alert eyes, about the circle.

"I think it's about time we stopped this nonsense, Mama," he began in a voice that made Mrs Cunningham's blood chill in her heart. "We've had enough of this convent talk—too much of it, if you ask me. I don't want to hear any more of it, and I don't want Cecy running up there all the time! You and Allie," he continued, now including his sister, just

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returned to the room, in a resentful look, "have filled this poor child's soft little head with God only knows what queer notions; she has no more idea what she's talking about than the baby here! I'm tired of all this foolishness about entering, and vocations, and all the rest of it!"

And dumping, or literally emptying, Cecilia upon the floor, he picked the evening newspaper from the table beside him and began to rattle the pages, glaring at them blindly, but with a darker brow than this little group had ever seen him wear before.

There was the silence of utter consternation about him. Even Tom made no sound. Paul, sticky-faced from the consumption of a large chocolate and cocoanut pig his brother had given him a few minutes before, and with his curls somewhat stringy, and his wide embroidery collar somewhat crumpled from romping, subsided, awed and bewildered, upon his brother's shoulder.

Cecilia, scarlet-cheeked and stupefied with astonishment and pain, stood looking from the rustling newspaper sheets to her mother's distressed face and back again. Aunt Allie, her lean arms folded, her lips tightly set, her eyes blinking rapidly, rocked to and fro in an agony of fear. Mrs Cunningham's face was flushed too, her mouth closed firmly, her nostrils dilating with her quick breath.

Papa was master of his own house, after all, and they all stood in deadly fear of him.

"Pete, that's a strange way for you to be talking," Mollie presently ventured, in a shaking voice she strove to make merely reproachful.

"Well, it's the way I'm going to talk from now on," Peter assured her, hardily, with his new grim, brief manner.

"Papa——" breathed Cecilia, impetuously, from a heaving breast.

"That'll do," he silenced her briefly. Cecilia let escape one sob, and fled wildly from the room.

"You may as well make up your mind to it, Mollie," said the master then, firmly. "There's to be no more nun talk here, and the sooner the child turns around and begins to behave herself like a sensible human being, the easier it'll be for the whole of us! It's 'Oh, I'm much obliged', when a fine feller like Jawn Kelly comes courtin', and it's 'Nothin' can stop me if it's right, Papa!' when her father talks to her, and it's all ballyhoo—and it's going to be stopped. You tell her that if I hear the word 'convent' around here in the next year, I'll go talk to the Superior myself! When she's twenty-five it'll be time enough. You and Allie——"

Allie, whose terrified expression had somewhat abated under the flow of words that seemed to be carrying the conversation safely away from her own personal neighborhood, shuddered violently again, shut her eyes and began to rock faster than ever.

"You and Allie have nothing better to do than coax her into the notion that it's a grand thing to be a nun," Peter continued, darkly. "Well, it may be—it may be, for some ger'rls. But not for my ger'rl! You keep your hands off her, the both of you, and leave her have her fun, dancin'

and flirtin' like the others—like Kate, that has no silly crazy notions of 'Oh, it's my dooty!' and 'Thank you very much but I won't marry you.' "

Mrs Cunningham had been rallying her forces during this tirade, and now, as the thunderous voice began to drop to heavy rumblings, and Peter's eyes began to scan the newspaper headlines between words, she rushed courageously into the breach.

"Papa, that's an awful way to talk about the Sisters!" she protested, firmly yet mildly.

"Well, I'll talk worse than that," Peter growled, unimpressed. "I'll not have them nuns tampering with my ger'rl, Mollie," he added, in a rising voice. "I had a letter from Good Mother today, asking me to be one of five men that'd go on their bonds," he continued, "and I'd three minds to tell them I'd talk old Cahill into foreclosing on them! Let them be druv out down San Bruno way, or over into Alameder, and they'd have something else to do than talkin' a child like Cecy into thinkin' she had a vocation."

This was frightful. Allie's thin lips moved in a prayer, and she again shut her eyes tightly and raised her lean, liver-spotted face, as one expecting a bolt from the blue. Mrs Cunningham fell silent, her eyes full of tears. Mart straightened Paul's collar, glancing stealthily meanwhile from the face of one parent to the other.

"Now, you go call your sister, Mart, and tell her to come to dinner," Peter, perhaps beginning to enjoy the novel rôle of tyrant, directed his second son, a handsome, ungainly boy of fifteen, who had just quietly entered the room. Martin wore a pepper-and-salt suit beginning to be too small for him, his raw young wrists showed; his magnificent cap of black, thick hair was very wet and sleek in front and very dry and rough in back.

"She's cr—r—ryin'," volunteered Martin, with the slight minor whine on the words that characterized all the children.

"Do as I tell you!" shouted his father. And Martin, with the innocent alarmed look of a young animal, fled as Cecilia had fled.

"Dinner is served when you are. Take your finger out of your mouth, Paul, a great big strappin' feller like you," Grace Nolan said, dispassionately, in a quietly conversational tone, from the doorway. Grace was elderly, and had been with the family since the period of comparative obscurity known as the "McAllister Street days."

She had apparently seen nothing, and the ruffled family rapidly reorganized itself, to present to this old servitor an undisturbed front. Yet Grace was but waiting her return to the kitchen to detail the whole thing, unsparingly, albeit sympathetically and fearfully, to the domestic staff.

Cecilia came down with dignity, her eyes red, her breath still uneven. Mrs Cunningham served the roast beef painstakingly, with more than the usual amount of murmuring to the children. Ellen, in high spirits, carried the occasion with an inspired rush of questions and confidences, however, and when Kate Walsh and John Kelly came in to call, at eight

o'clock, the larger part of the family had re-gathered in the sitting room, and the visitors saw nothing amiss.

CHAPTER III

KATE, Mrs Cunningham's niece, and the adored big cousin of all these sisters and brothers, arrived, whenever and wherever she arrived, with the vitalizing force of a fresh ocean breeze.

The circumstances of her life had up to this point been so tragic, and were even now surrounded by such bitter difficulties and disadvantages, that her elders, Aunt Maggie, Grandmother, the two incompetent uncles with whom she lived in the dreary Turk Street house, Aunt Mollie, and Aunt Allie, and Uncle Peter, here in the magnificence of the Howard Street mansion, usually put a "poor" before her name.

Kate frequently did, herself. She could hardly think of herself as anything but specially unfortunate. Yet from under her shabbiness, her poverty, her tears and humiliations and deprivations, her bubbling youth and beauty and optimism always rose triumphant, and Kate was in reality the happiest of creatures.

She was just twenty, and so six months older than Cecilia, beside whom she shone like a star. Cecy was pretty until Kate came along. Then Cecy began to seem just the rosy, healthy, blue-eyed, faintly freckled, black-curled little girl she was.

But nobody's proximity robbed Kate of beauty; it could not be done. Before the girl was fourteen she had learned to hold her young head high in disdain of admiring glances from "freshies" and "mashers" and other street-car and street-corner encounters. Mollie might take her girls down to "Maria," and fuss and worry over twelve- and fifteen-dollar hats for them, but Kate could walk into "Hale's Big, Bright, Busy Basement," and pick up, from the table marked "Choice, 98 cts.," any one of three hundred millinery confections, and look like "a picture on a handkerchief box itself" in one and all. When Kate woke up in the morning she suggested a rose; and when she sat up in bed, in a cheap cotton nightgown, and brushed her long, soft hair at night, she sometimes reminded Aunt Maggie of the Blessed Virgin.

She was tall, yet well built, exquisitely pale, yet without the slightest hint of anemia or delicateness. Her chestnut hair, which she wore in a braided coronet about her small, shapely head, was full of gold lights, and ringed itself about her low white forehead in little feathers and sprays. With the daisy-white skin and the fair hair, her eyes were the more extraordinary, dark blue eyes, "set in with a sooty finger," and fringed with black, thick, up-curling lashes. Kate's straight little white nose was a shade short, her upper lip a hint brief, her mouth quite frankly wide; but the big teeth shone like white enamel. The chin was clean-cut, the cheek-bones high, the eyes widely separated.

Yet to analyze Kate's beauty was not to find it. It was like the beauty of a still spring day, all emerald green, perfumed, tempered with broken lights, the murmuring of water among little stones, the upbeating of blue wings. It changed, throbbed, pulsed continually into new beauties; the blue eyes flashed or darkened, the mouth had a hundred kaleidoscopic expressions, and when she bound all her bright hair into a tight cap, or when she loosened it in a glory about her straight, slender shoulders, she presented an entirely new, and an incomparably lovely, Kate, to the eyes of onlookers.

Beauty, in this circle, however, was at a discount. All the girls were pretty enough. "You be neat and say your prayers and you'll get as good a husband as the next one," was the old saying their grandmothers had brought over from Kerry and Cork, and was the spirit still. It was "grand" that little Catherine Walsh, having no mother and no father, and a dressmaking aunt and indigent grandmother to say nothing of "them big, blunderin', good-natured ne'er-do-ye-wells of uncles" to handicap her, should have a pleasing person as an asset. But wealth was more important, and the poor child hadn't a sixpence, as everybody knew, nor like to have one. And family backing was important, too, and it was no more than "what poor Pat done for the pig, and that's et him," that Kate's family could or would do for her.

"If *she'd* have the vocation, now!" Peter Cunningham thought, when she came in tonight, shabby and radiant, and full of joyous greetings for the clan.

His brow, still shadowed with the unprecedented unpleasantness of the scene before dinner, brightened when he saw John Kelly with her. They had encountered, it appeared, by chance, on the Fillmore Street car. John was twenty-seven, but although Peter had associated with him many older men, in the business, his hopes were all set upon John as his right hand in the next score of years, and his successor when the time for a successor should come. His own boy, Tom, would prove to be a valuable man some day, please God. But John was unique, the unusual, the priceless find for the manager of a growing concern.

"Where's Tom and Aunt Mollie?" demanded Kate, distributing kisses. "Paul, you darling, do you love Kate? But give me a French kiss then—no, but hug me—*hard!*—— Give me another—— Ah, you angel! You're in retreat, aren't you, Cis? I told Mr Kelly so, but on he came," Kate threw in, in parentheses. "He had to see Uncle Peter about a carload of catsup or something, he said. Do you know what I heard today, Cis?" she went on. "I heard it in the Library. It was Veronica Crowley's married sister Regina Lynch who told me. She said you were going to be a nun, and that Veronica had made this retreat and said everyone said so, and Aunt Mag said that if you did go in, Uncle Peter was going maybe to give the nuns that big lot back of the convent."

A sulphurous silence warned her. But this specimen of feminine gossip rather pleased than freshly angered Peter. Characteristic of their gabble,

these pious women! Moreover, his young favorite was beside him, and Peter's one real topic of conversation was naturally his business. Time discussing anything else was time wasted, with Jawn here.

So he contented himself with a brief, bitter laugh, and said significantly to Kate:

"You run with them women, my dear, and you'll hear a good deal more than your prayers! Give them a lot, is it? Ain't they the grand crew for cookin' things up, Jawn?"

"Papa," Cecilia said, patiently and dutifully, "may I go with Aunt Allie, if she goes to church? I can't talk anyway, because——"

"I'm not going!" Miss Cunningham put in hastily and fearfully, not looking at anybody, but rocking convulsively once more.

Cecilia was silent a moment, and the color crept into her face.

"Then I think I'll go upstairs to bed," she suggested, quietly.

"Stay here and talk," her father directed her, restlessly.

"Papa, I can't. I'm in retreat."

"Run up to bed, dear, we'll take care of Kate and Jawn," Mollie said, maternally, returning to the room. Cecilia gave her mother's hand a convulsive, grateful pressure as she went, and Peter, although his eyes followed her discontentedly, made no protest. "Come here, Kate. I want to speak to you," Mollie bade her niece, drawing her to the hall door. "Tom's goin' out tonight, God knows where," she confided, anxiously. "Run up to his room, darlin', and see can you coax him down here amongst all of us, now that Jawn's here?"

"All right, dear," Kate answered, straightening the folds of her aunt's full basque with capable slender hands, and speaking with a little air of understanding and responsibility that sat oddly upon her twenty years. "But—here it is, Aunt Mollie," she added, half seriously, "don't you tell Aunt Maggie again that Kate's flirting with poor Tom!"

Mollie saw the flush upon the beautiful face, and a pang tore through her mother's heart. Surely little Kate Walsh wasn't setting her cap for Tom, seriously? That'd never do in the world! Mollie felt frightened. "Am I and Pete leaving them drift into something?" she asked herself, feeling suddenly helpless before youth, and beauty, and the inexorable forces of nature.

"Sure Tom's always liked Kate, and her him, they're cousins," Peter said to her more than once. But Mollie began to be afraid tonight of something more. They were not really cousins, they were less, for Kate's dead father had only been Mollie's younger half-brother. And although all the children had always loved Kate, her influence upon Tom had lately been made the subject of some family teasing.

She would hold him tonight, Mollie knew, and was cut to the heart to know; she would easily keep him at home, with her laughter and chatter, and her music. And Tom must be kept at home, all boys his age should. Kate could do what had to be done, and what his mother and

father could not do. "It throws them together, but what else can I do?" Mollie thought, her anxious fears seeking madly for an alternative.

She herself had just been sitting helpless, in his room, watching him dress, and sick with her own impotency where safeguarding him was concerned.

"Where is it tonight, darlin'?" she had asked.

"Oh, nowhere special!"

"That's enough for Mama, I suppose?"

"What do you want to know, Mollie dear?" He had laughed, kissed her, and fallen silent.

"Is it with Leo?"

"Leo, my God! That monk?"

"Who is it then, dear?"

"I don't know, Mama, honest. It's nobody special. I'm just going over to Dick's for a while, maybe we'll stay right there."

"Is Dick Dimond a good boy, Tom?"

"How d'ye mean good?"

Mollie had not liked the slightly truculent tone. She had been silent, had sighed, and had presently gone away.

"Going out evenings" meant everything terrible for her boy. It meant drink, and bad companions and gambling and women, and dancing hells, it meant danger, and sin. "God, keep the child from sin! Leave me die, but preserve him in his baptismal innocence!" Mollie had prayed, going downstairs. And downstairs, like an answer from God, was Kate, who had performed the kindly office of preserver to her handsome cousin many a time before, without Tom ever suspecting it.

Mollie did not want Kate to capture her son, as a husband. But while Kate had appeared fancy free, and was so disturbingly cool on the subject, there was surely no harm in using her. So Mollie once more implored the girl's help, and Kate, catching the excited and flattered Ellen by the hand, ran lightly up the stairs to Tom's big room.

"Oh, Tom, I'm dying—oh, why did we run—oh, Ellen, get off of me!" gasped Kate, entering without announcement, and casting herself and the child breathless upon the couch.

"My God, you're a sweet, restful influence in anybody's life, Kate!" Tom, with a pleasant undercurrent of admiration in his unexpectedly poised male voice, assured her, from the bureau. "Why don't you throw a couple of sticks of dynamite into the room, and give a fellow some warning?"

"Tom, you look stunning!" Kate said with conviction, tears of laughter and breathlessness in her eyes. "Come on downstairs and sing!"

"I gotter go out," Tom responded, but without enthusiasm. Nobody but Kate ever heard these odd throaty notes in his speech, or saw the shamed, daring, half-bold and half-shy light she saw in his eyes. "You'd have the whole crowd pressing around the piano, and pawing us both to death," he added, hesitating. "That one," he concluded, with a darkling

glance at Ellen, "can breathe on your neck until it's all wet, and then tickle it with the end of her braids until you'd want to brain her."

Ellen, about to weep, was arrested by Kate's silvery burst of delicious laughter, and laughed too, long and squawkingly.

"Can the college yell, for the love of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary!" begged Tom, whose scholastic years under the Jesuits had given him an ease in ecclesiastical reference sometimes disquieting to his mother. But Kate only laughed again. "Could you jettison a portion of the cargo?" he asked, significantly, of Ellen.

For answer the girl looked down at the child's straight tawny braids that bobbed and jerked about beside her.

"I don't believe it would be safe," Kate murmured, raising glorious eyes. "A young girl like me—unchaperoned——"

"You know darn·*well* it wouldn't be safe," Tom assured her, sitting down beside her. He loosened Ellen firmly from her grip upon her cousin. "Run downstairs and tell Mama we're going to sing," he said.

Ellen departed, glad to be entrusted with even a message from the god of her youthful idolatry, and the two young persons, left in the big room, looked half laughing and half scared at each other.

"Hello, Catherine," Tom said then, in a queer, shaky voice. He advanced a hand along the plush of the divan, and laid it over hers.

"Hello, Thomas," Kate answered, leaning back, and so a trifle away from him, excitedly laughing now.

"Do you know you're very pretty, Kate?" Tom said.

"I've heard it," Kate, after a moment's pause, during which they looked steadily at each other, responded sedately.

Tom moved himself nearer her, and put his strong young arm about her shoulders, and they both trembled.

The room was large, plainly furnished, and comfortable. Kate had been here a hundred times, a thousand times, she knew its every detail of tennis-rackets, school banners, and jumbled photographs. She had spent Saturday afternoons here, years ago, playing "Lotto" and "Parchesi" with Cecy and the boys, when the weather was wet, or the young Cunninghams had colds.

Oddly, tonight, she thought of it for the first time as a man's room, and of herself as a woman, here. Tom had been making love to her, in a more or less desultory fashion, for several—well, it amounted to weeks. She was beginning to be a little self-conscious about his kissing her; she always felt Tom's presence in a room, now, in a way she had never done a few months ago.

There was no harm in sitting here, of course, with his arm about her. Kate even liked it; the friendliness and bigness and quiet in the room, the knowledge of the murmuring household downstairs, of Cecy, Aunt Allie, Mart and Ellen, and the sense of the sweet, treacherously soft and perfumed night outside—a May night, warm and damp, after a wet April.

"I love this house," she said, dreamily. To a girl who lived in an old-fashioned cottage in Turk Street, it might well seem a palace, and so it always had seemed to Kate Walsh.

"Do you like *me?*" Tom paraphrased it.

"You know I do," she said, easily.

"The trouble with you, Kate," the boy presently defined, "is that too many people fall in love with you. Kelly, now—he came with you, did he?"

"John Kelly? Not he! We just met on the car. He'd as soon go after Aunt Allie! He'll marry some girl with money, John will," said Kate, without resentment. "Anyway, I think he likes Cecy," she added.

"Well, come on. How long is it since your last Confession?" Tom resumed. "Did Gerald Ohler come through?"

"Tom! What a horrible way to talk!"

"Come on—come on! Did he ask you?"

"Ye-es," said Kate, after a pause, and with an air of great candor, "in a way he did, and in a way he didn't!"

"How do you mean 'in a way he did, and in a way he didn't'?"

"Well," admitted Kate, with a slight frown, "I guess he—thought—he did——"

"*Thought* he did! My God, don't you know it when a man asks you to marry him?" Tom demanded, roundly. Kate flushed warmly.

"A lot of your business it is, Tom."

"You're my business. Say, why wouldn't you have him, Kate?"

"Oh, I don't love him, I guess. I like him. He doesn't count, one way or another!"

"What's he getting?"

"Oh, I don't know—a hundred, I guess. No, I think he said thirty a week. It wasn't that."

"How about Matt?"

"Oh, Tom, you're terrible! I wish I never told you anything."

"You didn't tell me—he did. Did you throw him down?"

"No, I didn't." Kate denied it flatly.

"You *didn't?*"

"No, of course not. In the first place, Matt never asked me."

"Never *asked* you! Why, he said himself he asked you on Christmas Eve."

"Oh, then? Oh, yes, he did *then,*" Kate amended, innocently. "I thought you meant lately!"

Tom laughed loudly.

"I bet you I could get you away from the whole crowd of them," he boasted, with a keen look.

Kate somewhat disengaged herself, laughing too, but flushed.

"You oughtn't to, Tom."

"Oughtn't to what?"

"Oughtn't to——" With a backward reach of her left hand she lightly

touched his firm fingers clamped on her left shoulder. "Your mother mightn't like it," she murmured.

The fascination of her closeness to him was strong upon him; he brought his handsome, impudent face near to her own, and their eyes, still staring half frightened and half laughing at each other, seemed to work a sort of happy spring madness in the quiet room.

"Aren't you my cousin?" Tom said, in a low voice that shook with real feeling, even under its teasing note.

"Not quite. Papa was only your mother's half-brother, after all."

"All the better, Kate!" the boy answered, tightening his grip.

"There was an old servant Grandma used to have," Kate presently began, her eyes widening in solemn childish warning, "and she said that a priest told her once at a Mission that it was no sin to kiss your cousin, as long as you didn't want to. But that the minute you began to enjoy it," Kate's tone was grave, "then *sin entered!*" she concluded. And this time they laughed together, joyously.

"Kate, do you like these talks we have?" Tom asked, luxuriously.

"You know I do!"

"What do you s'pose they'd say, if we took it into our heads to fall in love with each other?" the boy asked.

"You mean reasonably, seriously?" Kate asked in turn, as if at twenty and twenty-two, on this spring night, they two could discuss, of all others, this particular subject seriously and reasonably. "I think," she added, thoughtfully, "that Aunt Mollie would never forgive me!"

"Oh, rot!" Tom scoffed. But the thought had put a real shadow into Kate's beautiful eyes, and she was staring frowningly into space.

"She'd think I stole you away from her, Tom," the girl submitted with a brief, troubled laugh. And suddenly she was upon her feet, and had turned to drag him to his with both firm young hands, saying joyously: "You'd be too big a catch for me, Thomas, and besides that I'm going to marry a millionaire and be an old man's darling, and you can have Marion Taylor herself, for all I care! Coming, Aunt Allie!" Kate called, in answer to a sort of wail from the floor below. And she and Tom went down the two broad flights of stairs hand in hand, with such shrieks of laughter and thundering of young feet as went far to reassure Tom's mother, who had been uneasy, suspicious of their "flirtin' up in Tom's room", for some moments.

"Your mama was wondering where you were," Aunt Allie said, lifelessly, as they tore and struggled and gasped their way by her, in the upper hall, and— "My God, is it an earthquake!" Peter commented, mildly, as they entered the sitting room.

All men made love to Kate, she was entirely used to the enchanting experience of cutting short the dangerous tête-à-tête, only to be more pursued and desired than ever under the eyes of the unsuspicious crowd. But Tom had never seemed a real possibility before. Tom, too? she said

to herself, with a dimple twitching the corner of her mouth, as she seated herself demurely before the old square piano.

"Asthore?" she asked, beginning the accompaniment. Tom had a fine voice, he loved to use it. But with the first chords the lamplight on Kate's youngness, roundness, sweetness, the sound of her significantly laughing voice, the memory of those exquisite stolen moments upstairs, Tom experienced a sort of intoxication, and could only stand beside her laughing and fumbling with loose sheets of music on the rack.

Ellen joined them. Hers was the real voice of the family, but as usual when pointedly excluded, tonight she forced her way into the group and when begged to sing "The Minstrel Boy" for Papa, she hung her head and whined.

Paul was tearfully banished; Ellen protestingly had to follow; Martin, having upset a vase of flowers, caught his sleeve on the lamp and crushed one castor on a heavy chair, dragged his ungainly length upstairs; and the big house settled into peace.

Tom sang "Tara's Halls", and "Just a Song at Twilight", and Peter, with an apologetic, smiling shake of his head, openly wiped his eyes. Young John Kelly, as always friendly, silent, observant, sat back in his big chair, glad to be merely an onlooker. Mollie and her sister-in-law talked in undertones continually, in the pauses between the songs, or even straight through them.

"Aggie said she wouldn't wonder would Harry come back to live with them, now poor Nellie's gone," the women murmured, "they never got on very good."

"I heard that Lizzie kep' his room just like it was the night he died, the medicines and all beside the bed. God help her, she'll be a long time getting over it. Clara says if she's took off an ounce she's took off twenty pound——"

"Clara lent them the loan of her relic, but she says he was too far gone, he was rattlin' before ever she got to the house——"

"Oh, the dear Lord help us all!"

And so on and on. Mollie's heart was brimful of vague troubles tonight, and she gave small heed to what she said. She and Allie could keep the conversational pot at a low, unimportant simmer for hours at a time. Often they sat up almost all night, discussing the affairs of others, tiny details of old funerals and long-ago family fights.

"That's pretty, about the birds," Mollie said, in a louder voice presently, of a song. Tom sang it again, with a flourish.

For his song is all of the joy of life,
And in the bright spring weather,
We two have listened, while he sang,
Our hearts and lips together.

His big voice filled the room; he ended with a look for Kate, and his mother saw it. Kate missed none of it, her blood was dancing to new

music tonight. Suddenly everything about the familiar old house seemed changed, seemed fraught with trembling, shimmering, quivering beauty. Tom's nearness made her heart beat fast, and the glances they exchanged —innocent glances for so many young, cousinly years!—were full of queer thrills and surprises.

"Tom, you scare me," she murmured, over an accompaniment.

"I what, asthore?" His sleek black head was bent.

"I say, you scare me!"

"You little darling, I wish I did! Scare you of what?"

More chords, and the rich, curling dark lashes dropped over the apricot-stained, creamy pallor of her cheeks.

"I don't know," she half whispered.

"More music!" commanded Peter, less unobserving than might have been supposed. "What about the little ships?"

Tom, bold, confident, laughing in the mellow lamplight, sang it with all his own natural, audacious grace:

So all the little ships come sailing home across the sea,
Their voyage safely ended, their way they've wended
Home where they would be!
They sail across the bar where no storms are,
All dangers passed,
And two by two together,
Come safely home at last!

Little ships! Mollie's eyes met her husband's, and, struck by the same thought, they smiled at each other through a dazzle of tears. Little ships —the big house was the safe harbor for them all tonight. Petulant little bewildered baby ships asleep upstairs in the nursery, the white young ship that was Cecilia ready for her virgin trip, Mart's daring young bark almost seaworthy; other dear, ignorant, restless young ships here in the sitting room, shaking their untried sails in the breeze.

"Sing it again, Tom," Peter commanded, and Tom and Kate went through it a second time, with even more feeling.

And then it was after ten, and Kate had to go. John would see her home. Not necessary, she assured him blithely, the car went within forty feet of the door. Of course he would see her home, he said, with kind, grave persistence. No, Tom would. Well, then both——

In the end, Tom sulkily declined the divided duty, and Kate when off with John. Mollie was tearing the air with sharp yawns as she went wearily up the big stairs.

She lay awake long that night, worried about a dozen trifles. She was tired in mind and body, and all her problems took on grotesque and menacing shapes. Her heart would begin to hammer violently as she thought of Ellen's tonsils; somebody had known of a child who bled to death under that operation. Then she would remember what Martin had confided to her, when she looked in upon him, undressing a few hours

ago. Martin was specializing in chemistry, for no particular reason than that he liked it, and this month he had broken seventeen dollars' worth of tubes and glasses. Brother Hippolyte had sent his mother a note with the bill.

Seventeen dollars was not much to Peter Cunningham. But seventeen dollars' worth of broken glass might well seem a serious matter to him. He would be "fit to be tied" with anger at Martin. Well, then, thought Mrs Cunningham, turning restlessly about in her big bed, at her sleeping lord's side, Peter mustn't know. She must get the money some way.

She had no money of her own; she hated the mysteries of a checkbook. Like many another good wife of her type, she charged everywhere, and asked Peter at the breakfast table for such pocket-money as she needed. Maybe Pete'd give her a couple of twenties tomorrow, if he had them with him, she mused.

Paul's croup, Ellen's tonsils, Martin's wildness—ah! and Tom and Kate Walsh. Tom was falling in love with Kate. His mother saw it clearly.

Little Kate Walsh walking off with a Cunningham! That'd be queer doings. A big catch for a girl like that—poor Robbie's girl. Mollie visioned Kate betrothed to Tom, and a writhing pang of pure jealousy shook her. There'd be dinners and goings-on, of course, and presently a big Cathedral wedding—Kate Walsh would be Mrs Thomas Cunningham.

Mollie couldn't bear it. She was suffocating. The air seemed full of mocking demons, taking her dearly prized honors away from her and giving them to Kate.

She got out of bed, padded about like a restless big mother bear. As usual, Pete had forgotten to open the window. No wonder she couldn't get to sleep. She pushed the heavy sash up a few inches, and got back into bed.

The street light shone in a bright angle on the wall. The room was full of muffled big shapes, loops of drapery, bulky furniture. Kate and Tom—the specter rose full-formed before the boy's mother again. Her heart hammered anxiously. Kate would get him; Kate would own this house some day, this fabulous mansion that Mollie and Peter had builded for themselves; Kate would have babies, big, strong, hard boy babies.

Mollie would be old—displaced. She felt as if her heart would burst with the agony of being supplanted by merciless youth.

Well, but this was nonsense. The children had only chanced to look sweet at each other, that was all. Tom felt to Kate as a sister, and as for the girl—Mollie's mouth tightened. She wasn't going to walk in here and take him, now, not if his mother knew it! Maybe a hint to Maggie, a hint to Kate herself, or maybe if the boy could be gotten out of the way——

A sudden light broke upon Mollie's anxious pondering, and she felt a wave of cool relief sweep over her. Paris! That'd be it. Tom should go to Paris. He'd been talking Paris ever since he finished school, a year

ago. His old school friend, Joseph Harrison, was going there, in a few weeks, to study art, and why not persuade Peter that Tom ought to go, too, to study singing? She could make Pete think that he himself was the instigator of the notion. Indeed, she could open the subject no later than tomorrow with some such a key phrase as: "Well, Pete, do you know I think you're in the right of it, after all, and maybe a few months of study abroad would sort of settle the boy."

Not that Pete had ever voiced any such sentiment, far from it. But when he heard it he would immediately think he had.

Peter and Mollie had both been vaguely opposed to the idea; vaguely because even Tom's importunity had not carried it beyond a few joking allusions. Mollie had shrunk from the mere thought of giving up her boy. Almost nothing, indeed, had been heard of it for months. But Mollie could revive it in half an hour, could settle it in a few days, she knew. She'd begin, planned this loving schemer, by telling Pete what Willie Harrison was doing for Joe. Going to send the boy abroad for a year's work, and let him see Rome and Ireland before he came back. Ah, well, the Harrisons could well do it; they hadn't but the one child.

That'd touch Pete in his most sensitive spot, pride in what he could afford to do for the children.

And Joe Harrison's immediate departure would be an excuse for hurrying Tom off, too. Mollie winced a little at the thought. But it was one sure, quick way of stopping this nonsense with Kate. She could use that argument with Pete, too. For Pete had said heavily tonight that he didn't propose to encourage any nonsense between their Tom and Kate Walsh. And to Mollie's curious and sympathetic, "Why not, Papa?" he had added that while she was a dear little ger'rl, he hoped the boy would wait awhile, and make a different marriage when he did marry. Self-made, and quick to notice real fineness and merit where younger men were concerned, as in the case of John Kelly, yet Peter had his traces of snobbery, as it was inevitable that he should. He had risen from nothing to great heights. There was no reason why his children should not rise still higher. And his wife's niece, a working girl, saddled with a group of wretchedly helpless elderly relatives, offered, as a wife, no upward step to a Cunningham.

Paris, Mollie exulted, perfecting her plan in a brain that fairly seethed with details, Paris was the solution! Six weeks more would see Tom safely out of Kate's way for a good long year.

She was subsiding gradually into drowsiness when a fresh thought shot across her mind, and her heart began to thump nervously again. Cecilia's vocation, and the empty lot, and the end of the retreat tomorrow! Worries swarmed like bees about poor Mollie's wearied head once more.

Pete had been so "ugly,"—it was his wife's word for these rare ungracious moods of his,—Pete had been so ugly about the whole thing tonight! Mollie and Allie had known of plenty of other fathers who

took this dramatic stand. But it seemed different, now that it was Pete.

Cecy, he had said inflexibly, was to wait for a year. No more nonsense about vocations for a year. He didn't want to hear it, and he trusted Mollie not to encourage it privately. The child was to keep away from the convent, and if she had any energy to spare, leave her take care of her little sister and brothers, said her father.

Well, there was nothing for Mollie to do but face the situation, then. If Sister Aloysius made any further playful allusion to the property Mollie would simply have to tell her the whole truth, that the poor child's father had been in a terrible way about it, and "fit to be tied", and exactly what were his terms.

"Let her fall in love with some decent feller like Jawn Kelly," Peter had gone on to say: but Mollie certainly would not quote that. Her motherly resentment, if concealed, had been up in arms at that. Let the men make much of John, if they would, in a business way. But hand her lily-child over to any one so ordinary, so plain——!

Mollie could never forget that Jawn had been taken into the business as office-boy only a few years before. It was twelve years, but she always thought of it as about five. Office-boy—red-wristed, shabby, tousle-headed, no bigger nor more important than her own poor wild Mart!

Cecy wanted to be a nun, little saint that she was. But failing a vocation, she could look a good deal higher than little Jawn Kelly!

The mother's last thought, as all her troubled thoughts sank into peace, was purely physical. Tired as she was, she would have to get up at a good, prompt half-past six, to be at the convent in time for the end of the retreat! Mollie was conscious of a weak temptation to drop the whole thing. Suppose she just slept late in the morning; she could tell Cecy she had overslept. The child would be broken-hearted, but it would save Mollie the awkwardness of following yesterday's expansive enthusiasm about the vocation, and the gift of property, with what must surely be a humiliatingly altered position tomorrow.

All she need do was oversleep! If Allie didn't take it upon herself to rap at her door——

"Well, Sister, my husband has took a very firm stand about the poor child's vocation, entirely," Mollie drowsily imagined herself saying. It would be hard, it would put her in the position of a fool.

Midnight boomed solemnly from the hall, and was followed by twelve neat, light strokes from the French clock on the mantel. Midnight!

"I'm lying awake all night worrying about the children," Mollie thought, with simple awe. "It's true what my mother's told me many and oft's the time. 'When they're little they break your back, and when they're big they break your heart on you!'"

And heaving a deep sigh, she was immediately asleep.

CHAPTER IV

So SHORT A TIME before all their problems had seemed to be so simple! Problems of broken legs, measles, arithmetic, poison-oak, of Mart being "sassy" to Brother Borromeo, and Ellen disobeying Papa!

And now they were all men and women, and poor Mollie, looking back with an aching heart at the days of their wading in brooks and quarreling for the one piece of pineapple that always came on top of the boxes of candy, felt that there was never a night that a body could get off to sleep for worrying about them.

One trouble, solved and surmounted, only led to another. One could say "Mama knows best", or "You do as Papa tells you", but the young things didn't believe it, didn't act upon it, and went their own infinitely disturbing ways.

Mollie had so concentrated her forces upon the matter of getting Tom off to Paris, had carried the whole thing with so high a hand, that the boy had actually kissed them all good-by, over at the Oakland mole, and had come back to kiss the crying Kate again, and had huskily asked his mother "to write, and tell him about everybody—and Kate," before she had seemed to have time to analyze, in cold blood, the wisdom of sending him away at all, and granting that he should go somewhere for safety's sake, to Paris of all places.

Not but what Tom was happy and busy and, at least as far as letters were any indication, well-behaved, in Paris. That was one of the things that worried his mother. He was too happy; he wrote frankly that San Francisco, after Paris, seemed like a regular jumping-off place, and if Papa would make him an allowance of a hundred a month he'd stay in France the rest of his life.

She seemed to have lost Tom. And this year of awaiting her father's permission to enter the convent seemed strangely to have lost Cecy to her family, too. Cecy had drawn into herself, had become remote, silent, reserved.

There had been a terrible scene, the first in her sunshiny, well-ordered young life, when Cecy had realized that Papa was in deadly earnest, and that her vocation was not to be the simple thing of joy, holiness, incense, serge frock and plain veil, admiration, and envy, that she had so fondly and romantically imagined. Cecy had flown to her favorite nun, had wept, begged, protested—she was nineteen, she hated the world, she detested men and lovers and the idea of marriage. Please, Papa, please, Mom, please, Sister—for God's sake, let her in! Let her enter, the time of waiting was wasted! Her mind had been made up since the day of her First Communion—please, please, Ellen and Kate and Aunt Allie, pray for her intention!

No use. Peter had been adamant, and even gentle Sister Ignatius had

shown an unexpected firmness. Cecilia was so young, the nun had reasoned, a year of obedience would not be too long a test. Plenty of time. Cecilia should come to them next year at Pentecost, instead of this year.

Myra Garvey entered the convent, and Cecilia shed floods of tears. Lizzie Kennedy went East to join the Carmelites, and Cecilia cried all night. "She might just as well enter," commented Tom, "as act like such a bonehead!"

The girl lost her rosy, healthy beauty, and became sullen and cold. Her father missed his little confidante and chum; her mother's heart bled silently in sympathy. Cecy's attitude toward John Kelly amounted to positive rudeness, and John came rarely nowadays to the big house in Howard Street. And Martin was suspended from school for insubordination, and sent by his disgusted father up to a ranch in Stanislaus County, to "sweat some of the devil out of him," as Peter put it forcefully.

A blight seemed to have fallen upon the family, with Mart gone, Cecy entirely metamorphosed, and Tom a long two-weeks' journey away, in Paris. The days went on and on; Mollie bought Mart a new sweater when he came down in November, and reinstated him with many explanations and promises in his school work; she trimmed a tree and had all the Walshes at the house for Christmas, and Ellen had her usual January tonsillitis.

"The big boy's in Paris; he's doing very good work there, but we expect him back, to go into the firm with his papa, next summer," Mollie said, meeting other women on the convent steps or shopping in one of the city's large department stores, and she tried to sound satisfied. And when March came, in a flood of glory and warmth, she dared to add, to old friends: "Cecy'll probably enter in a month or two. We aren't saying very much about it because her Papa feels so strong on the subject. But she's twenty now, and she's had the idea for years!"

"Are you happy about it, Cecy?" Kate Walsh asked her cousin one night when she had come into the Cunningham house for one of her little evening calls. The two girls were on the sofa in Mollie's room, hands clasped, chattering of everything and nothing, after a few days' chance separation.

"Oh, happy——!" Cecy answered, with a smile. "Mama and I bought the serge for my dress today," she added, in a little rush of confidence, after a glance at the door to be sure that they could not be overheard.

Kate's glorious eyes widened, her breath came fast. This was thrilling indeed.

"Don't say anything about it," warned Cecy. "But Aunt Maggie's coming to sew, to make Ellen some ginghams and so on, and she'll make my dress next week! Mama can't get her again until June, and that'll be"—Cecy's voice rose exultantly—"that'll be too late!" she ended, gladly.

"Yes, but Aunt Maggie is an awful gab," Kate reminded her, without

disrespect. "She'll have it all over the place that you're getting your postulant's dress. Your father will be sure to hear it."

"Ah, but I shall ask Papa next week—Easter Week," Cecilia answered, still with her air of rejoicing. "You see, it was at last year's retreat, Kate, that I asked him, and that was the second week in April. The year is up! And Lent being so late this year, that brings it into Easter Week; Mama says it's a sign! Anyway, she and I are going to have a talk with Sister on Easter Sunday, and immediately afterward—oh, Kate, I shall be so happy! And except for Sister Regina, who died, I shall be the youngest ever to enter! We got serge for two dresses, and my veils, too! My sleeves I'm going to have long; you know that makes your hands look so nice."

Kate laughed. "You oughtn't to think of such things, Cecy!"

The other girl flushed sensitively. She could not help thinking that she would look extraordinarily young, kneeling among the older nuns in her new plain serge, with the thin black veil over her curly hair. Cecy had determined long ago to be more than humanly "recollected" in chapel, to oblige some edified nun occasionally to touch her on the arm, to remind her that the time for devotion was over.

"That's Cecilia Cunningham," outsiders, coming in for Benediction, would whisper. "They say she's almost a mystic!"

Kate's good-natured laughter hurt her. Her exalted mood vanished, and she felt almost ill-tempered.

"But what's this about your getting a new dress of net and lace and I don't know what all?" asked the unconscious Kate.

"Oh, Papa's going to take me somewhere!" Cecilia answered, indifferently and shortly.

"A last taste of the giddy world?" Kate asked. "It's a dinner, isn't it, or is it a dance? What a trial for you!"

"It's both," Cecilia said, her equilibrium somewhat restored by the consideration that the worldly parents of many great cloister saints had thus forced upon them a final plunge into things mundane.

"Pink lace and orchids Easter Monday night, and the convent on Tuesday. I wish to goodness I could go to the party in your place!" Kate said.

"I wish Papa wouldn't make me!" Cecilia complained. But even as she spoke, the vision of herself garbed in the rosy cloud of the new dress, and admired and courted in the gay whirl of music and feasting, yet so soon to abandon it all for the sober serge of the scapular, appealed suddenly to her youthful sense of the dramatic.

Both girls fell silent. It happened to be one of Kate's despairing times, when life seemed too hard to be borne. But she never brought those moods here. Her thoughts followed more than one idle path before she asked casually:

"Any news from Tom?"

"Except that he doesn't want to come back. Mama feels terribly about it."

"They couldn't wait to rush him off into God knows what dangers to his soul and body—losing checks and seeing a poor dead feller that was drowned hauled out of one of their rivers," Aunt Allie, who was putting fresh linen clothes away in Mollie's bureau, put in bleakly.

"Tom was sweet on Kate!" Ellen contributed, trailing Aunt Allie.

"Tom was not!" Kate answered, laughing.

"I'd 'a' been glad enough to have him sweet on Catherine or anybody else, so that he'd stay home!" Mollie entirely ready to believe that she had always felt so, said sadly, coming in to sit down rather heavily.

"You didn't always feel so, Aunt Mollie!" Kate commented, smiling.

"Indeed I did, dear. If you mean you and him," said Mrs Cunningham, self-defensively, "it was natural enough that I should wish him to have his little fling, and him not pushing twenty-three yet, before he'd be settling down. But God knows all I'd want for him is a good wife——" She drifted into silence.

"I'm not in love with Tom, Aunt Mollie, and never was," Kate said with sudden seriousness and quietness, after a pause. Cecilia, full of religious dreams and visions, looked at her with a little simple admiration and awe. Kate was really a woman, to take that definite tone where a love affair was concerned!

"Well, I know that, dear," Mollie agreed, quick to save the girl's pride. "And at the same time, should you and Tom take a fancy to each other, there'd be no reason in the world——"

"Never!" Kate said in a whisper, with her eyes far away. And Cecilia felt another thrill. Kate somehow seemed grown-up tonight.

"You and me, Kate," Mollie said, a little tremulously, and seeing nothing; "we'd like to have the lad home again, wouldn't we?"

She leaned forward and laid her soft, full hand over Kate's hand, and Kate suddenly bent her beautiful glowing face to it, and kissed it.

"Indeed I hope he'll be back this summer, Aunt Mollie!" she said, gently. But Cecilia knew somehow that Kate didn't care, that way, for Tom any more, if indeed she ever had.

"You take a very different tone from the way you and Pete talked last year, Mollie," Miss Cunningham, now running a lean discolored hand into socks, and still standing at the bureau, reminded her sister-in-law.

"I?" Mollie echoed, roundly. "Wasn't I the one that was all for having him remain at home?"

"H'm!" Aunt Allie said, shortly. And she smiled in an obscure and sinister triumph as she matched the socks.

"Well, we'll have him back this summer, and please God he'll stay here!" Kate, the peacemaker, interposed skillfully.

"Kate," Ellen asked rapturously, winding herself about Kate's legs, as she lay on the floor, "is it fun to have men in love with you?"

Kate, beautiful and flushed, looked down at her little cousin with a smile twitching at the corner of her mouth.

"Y-es," she admitted, with a little deprecatory glance for the circle. "Yes, on the whole I think it is."

"Kate, is any one in love with you *now?*" persisted the little girl.

"Isn't she terrible!" Cecilia murmured, with a little laugh of relish. But Cecy was interested, too.

"I heard Jim Yeats was sweet on you, Kate," Aunt Allie suggested, smiling.

"That old man!" Kate evaded, gaily. "If he is, I hope he keeps it to himself!"

"Kate, did you and Tom——" Ellen was beginning, when her mother cut her short.

"Don't worry Kate about Tom, lovey. He'll be home one of these days to speak for himself!"

"Yes, but, Mama, if Kate married Tom, how could she be my sister if she's my cousin?" Ellen demanded.

Kate, again with that new, wise gravity that Cecilia noticed so strongly about her tonight, caught the little hands, as Ellen perched astride of her knees, and smiled at her affectionately.

"Tommy and I were only like a brother and sister, Ellen dear," she said, as if to the child. But her elders knew that she was really addressing them. "I could no more fall in love with him than if he were my brother," Kate added.

Mollie, sitting in a deep upholstered chair a few feet away, heard the new note in her tone, too, and wondered at it, with a little fear in her heart. What had changed the child, that she should be talking so soberly about the things she had laughed at youthfully only a few months ago?

Kate and Ellen were now tussling mildly; Aunt Allie had seated herself with her mending basket. Cecilia leaned back on the couch, staring dreamily at the other girls, and thinking, her mother knew, how few more of these happy, homely evenings in Mama's room were left to her. Her eyes were deeply satisfied as she dreamed, but a sudden pang seized the mother's heart. Was she really to pack the plain, dainty underwear and the little serge dresses, and permit the precious oldest girl to kiss father, brothers, and sister good-by—in a few days, now, only a few days!—for evermore? For the first time Mollie realized what it meant.

"Well, I wonder are we all going crazy that we could even be thinking about it?" she asked herself, in panic. "No more of my little Cecy—ever? God help me, I'll never let her go! She's had me bewitched with her talk."

Musing thus, her eyes went on to Kate, who had leaned back, so that although her arm still encircled Ellen, her radiant and glowing face was close to Martin's face. Martin had brought in his Latin Grammar, and Kate was bringing her beautiful thick brushed brows together in a faint frown as she studied it.

"For the love of Saint Louise of Prussia," she murmured.

"It's crazy, isn't it!" Mart agreed, eagerly. But Kate was absorbed again, and presently the puzzle, whatever it was, was all straightened out, and Martin, although he continued to slump comfortably against her firm young shoulder, went on with his studying alone.

How the children all loved Kate, Mrs Cunningham thought, not surprised to have little Paul trail sleepily in, in his nightgown, and climb into the maternal lap. And how sweet it was to have them all together, with Kate to chatter to and confide in!

"Kate's like her father—like Robbie," decided Mrs Cunningham, remembering the dear half-brother who had been her inseparable chum thirty years before. "He might have done good for her, if he hadn't died on the poor child! There was a feller that could charm the birds off the bushes for you, did he but have the chance! You'd wonder," her pondering ended simply, "that the Lord would leave Harry and Charley, that never done a lick of work the longest day they ever lived, and take a boy like poor Robbie!"

Ah, if Tom only were here, one of this happy, murmuring, laughing group: Cecy so angelic, Mart studying, little Ellen perfectly contented when she could have her Katy to play with, Paul half asleep, and Aunt Allie listening and nodding. If Tom were home, and openly and acceptedly Kate's sweetheart! "Sure, it wouldn't be losing him at all, to let her have him!" Mollie assured herself.

So far had she come from the old fearful jealousies of a year ago. Mollie would never believe again that his youthful affair with his cousin had played any part in Tom's being sent away. Even Peter, soliloquizing, father fashion, about his oldest boy, had forgotten Kate's share in the business. It was more dangerous women than Robbie's pretty, innocent, good Kate that the parents feared now: the "divorced lady" he had danced with on the boat, the students and visitors in the French city. Everyone laughed at the idea of handsome, fascinating Tom Cunningham in Paris. Everyone, that is, except his father and mother. Had he fallen in love with a model, yet? asked the world, cheerfully. Every hint of it was like a knife in Mollie's heart.

Why should he fall in love with a model—a divorced woman—a mannikin? she would ask herself, sick at heart. But ah, why not? Why not? Why not? the agonizing counter questions came. Suppose the lad was being coarsened ,was becoming familiar with impurity and sin and all the hideousness of the world?

Mollie listened to the children, half smiled. But her heart was heavy with forebodings. Ah, why in God's name had they let Tom go, away from his mother's prayers, his father's good, clean example, and the friendship of this beautiful, pure, clever good girl, who might have dropped into his hand like the exquisite fruit she was?

Well, Tom would be back, please God, in time to win her. And Cecy shouldn't be whisked into the convent in any such precipitous fashion as she so fondly anticipated—that was flat. She should wait until the fall,

at least. So that it would all be as it had been for so many years Cunninghams and Kate all together for the summer, strawberries peaches and broad hats, at the camp where they went every year, an the pines of Lake Tahoe.

Aunt Allie was telling a story. The youngsters were listening to it perhaps the hundredth time, but enthralled all the more for that. A Allie's language, in the excitement of the narrative, reverted a trif the vernacular, but nobody noticed it.

"She see this feller—a great brute of a bloodhound!—trackin' t'roo the deep bogs itself, and over a little cool of rocks that you'd notice come daytime, but this was gloamin'. Her heart tuk a great le her side, and she says, 'If I run, he'll get me two little lady goats, th worth their own weight in new shillin's, an',' she says, 'God knows w drop me baby, runnin', and dash the brains out of him, the way I' flingin' him on a rock!' Wit' that, she grabbed the baby closer, and tuck a little noose she had, and trun it over the little lady goats, an' give a look back an' the dog was clost upon her, with the big drip muzzle of him clost to the sod——"

"This was Grandma, Mama!" Ellen interrupted, excitedly, catch her mother's eye. Mollie nodded, she had known the story herself, w she was Ellen's age. "Come to the fire part, Aunt Allie!" Ellen cha the narrator eagerly.

The fire, introduced with the phrasė, "an ould lad in a cassock nu a few brands of peat," duly came in, and the dog was worsted, and itinerant monk looked at the baby, and said he would live to be a sa "And a saint my brother Thomas was, if ever there was one," A Allie ended with tears.

"Pop all alone?" Martin, with one of his unexpected flashes thoughtfulness, asked then.

"No. Jawn Kelly come in, they're talking," Mollie answered, be ring herself, and her armful of sleeping baby, none the less. And anyb noticing Kate then would have seen her color change, her whole b spring into electrified tension, and relax again.

But nobody did, and presently Cecy began desultorily to prepare bed, and Mollie, sending the younger children away, went downsta Kate sat on, with Allie, feeling the pounding of her own heart, consc that every fiber of her being was dragging toward the man who did want her, who did not know she was alive.

Was there any valid reason why she should not go downstairs? W he go, without her catching a glimpse of him? Her hands were cold, her mouth dry; she felt sick with suspense.

"Mollie's a great one to change her mind," Aunt Allie, who often m common cause with Kate, commented mildly but significantly, when t were alone. "She and Pete are worried now that Tom doesn't wan come home. I don't know what would hurt him, over there. They they're all Catholics, with none of this New Thought and all the

of it! He'll do worse here than there, I say. Leave him be. They were very my-bread-and-your-butter last year," Aunt Allie added, "but they'd be glad if you'd have him now, Kate."

"Oh, Aunt Allie!" the girl whispered, with a suffocated laugh. What was John Kelly doing, saying, looking, thinking, downstairs? Her beautiful young body was twisted as if on the rack; as she sat apparently composed on the couch electricity seemed to run in her veins, and not one fiber of her entire being was still. She half rose, alert eyes on the door; sank back again. She heard the front door slam, or thought she did. It was all over, he was gone. "What's 'my-bread-and-your-butter' mean?" she asked almost at random, as Cecy, brushing her hair, returned in her wrapper and slippers.

"That's the old country couple who thought nobody was good enough for their daughter," Miss Cunningham elucidated, readily, "because she had three hundred pound. Finally they married her to a very good feller that didn't have much, and she begun by boastin' very vaingloriously of this and that she'd brought along with her. 'Oh, are you usin' the chair my ma give me?' she'd say, and 'Them chickens of mine will come in handy for the eggs they'll be layin',' and so on and on, until me young lad had all he could bear of it.

"Well, didn't he ask her father and mother would they dine with him and his young wife, and down they set to a very good meal, and this young fellow begun on them the same way. 'Will you have some of me wife's chicken with my bread sauce and a glass of my cider?' he'd say. 'Take one of me forks, won't ye, and try one of me wife's pickles with it. Pass some of your bread and some of my butter to your mama, my dear,' he says. So that was the way he cured her," Allie concluded with relish, "that she'd never shame him again, and a good wife she made him, and they said when she died—it was the bitter winter time—that the corpse would keep, and 'twas all the priest himself could do that the husband would consent she'd be buried at all."

"Kate," Mrs Cunningham, somewhat breathless from the climb upstairs, said in the doorway. "Go to bed, Mart, for goodness sake, and you too, Ellen!" she added, in a disapproving undertone to the younger children, who had once more gathered about their aunt and cousin. "You'll have that stomach biliousness on you again," she warned the younger child. "Kate, Jawn Kelly's going to take you home, so get your hat," she finished.

"Oh, he doesn't have to!" Kate expostulated, turning scarlet.

"Well, your uncle passed the remark—— That's not worth mendin', Allie," Mrs Cunningham said, sitting down. "Throw them out when they get like that."

"Give them to the Sisters, they'll make them like new!" Miss Cunningham substituted, with her odd air of resentment at any suggestion from Mollie. "Just because your children can afford new, it's no less a sin that you should throw——"

"I can get home alone, my gracious!" Kate said, uncomfortably, buttoning on her old coat.

"Well, your uncle passed the remark that you'd soon be goin', and Jawn says he was goin' your way." Mrs Cunningham raised her full, firm face up to left and right, and Ellen and Mart kissed her good-night again from behind. "Or else it was your uncle suggested it," she continued, vaguely and Kate's face, upon which a sort of starry pallor had shone like a light, flamed suddenly again.

Cecy clung to her. "Kate, we'll have only a few more nights! Come tomorrow night, can't you, and sleep with me? Can she, Mama?"

"Indeed she can," Mollie agreed, cordially. "But we may keep her here much longer than she thinks!" she added, with a significant glance at Cecy. Cecy's sensitive little face flushed quickly.

"Mama, how do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"Never mind now," Mollie temporized, soothingly. "We'll have to talk it all over."

"Talk it all over!" echoed Cecy, aghast. "But, Mama—but, Mama—we *did* talk it all over! You said, and Papa himself said——"

"There's no use distressin' yourself, it'll all be as Papa decides," her mother began, nervously.

"Oh, Papa!" murmured Cecy, breathing again. "He said——"

"As I and Papa decide," Mollie continued, magnificently. "And it may be weeks, and it may be—— But run along, Kate, and give my love to Aunt Maggie and Grandma," she interrupted herself. Kate had a last impression of Cecy's outraged countenance, Aunt Mollie's unsuccessful effort to appear quite poised and cool, and Aunt Allie's triumphant and scandalized astonishment, as she went out into the hall.

A light was aways burning in the chapel, and upon a sudden impulse Kate went toward it, and slipped to her knees upon a *prie-dieu* before the little altar. Her heart was pounding so violently and her senses were in such a whirl of confusion that she could formulate no coherent thought, much less prayer.

"Oh, God, make him like me!" she said, a dozen times, before she went slowly downstairs.

Slowly, and with a wait on the second landing. The wide hall below was dimly lighted, a gush of brighter light came from the sitting room, and Kate could hear the men's quiet voices.

They nodded as she came in, continued their talk. Kate sat down in a big chair, and stared at the fire.

"Why not get hold of that fellow from Marysville yourself, Mr Cunningham, and maybe have him handle it through the Sacramento store?"

"And then have the Red Bluff place, too?"

"Well, they did very well there this year."

"They done more business there last year than the whole business done here and everywhere else, ten years ago! Who was it told me that, Jawn? Somebody did," Peter said in satisfaction.

"Exactly," said Jawn Kelly's fine, quiet voice.

Kate looked full at him; he was half turned toward her uncle, and she saw his profile. John was olive-brown in complexion, with black eyes and a crop of satiny hair that rose thickly from his broad forehead and retreated in deep, even scallops, persistently curly despite brushes and cold water. He was of a good height, splendidly muscular and broadly built; he looked squarely at his employer as he talked to him, not smiling often, but occasionally breaking the seriousness of the conversation with a boyish, bashful grin that was gone almost before it was formed.

A fire was drowsing behind the polished steel bars of the grate, for the spring evening was chilly. Kate liked this room best of all downstairs, although it was only half the size of the magnificent dining room, and naturally had not the formal qualities of the parlors. Mollie's parlors were full of vases and onyx, mirrors and gilt chairs, satin furniture and ormolu tables. There were life-sized statues in the parlors, and standing lamps.

But here in the sitting room a homelier note of comfort prevailed; Miss Alcott's books were to be found face downward on the davenport, and Paul's baby chair had its own place among the larger chairs. Music coasted from the square piano, and Mollie had tucked a little cross of yellowing blessed palm into a picture frame on the mantel, the frame that held a photograph of the children, taken ten years before. Tom was a splendid grave little First Communicant of twelve in the picture; Cecy a spiritual ringletted creature of nine in striped stockings; Martin a stout five, in a frilled embroidery collar and more curls; and, seated in Cecy's lap, all ribbons and dimples, the beautiful baby, Daisy, who was destined to slip away from the conscientious little sisterly arms so soon.

There were other photographs in the room: Mollie herself in her first fur coat and a wide plumed hat; goggling babies of all types, many with their plain-haired, anxious-looking young mothers; Cecy's Confirmation picture; and a truculent, crimped photograph of Allie, who threatened almost every day to "throw the thing into the fire."

"Well," said John Kelly, presently, with his friendly look for Kate, "I'm keeping Miss Kate here waiting. How goes the world with you?"

"The world always goes well with that one," Peter answered, affectionately, as Kate, trying to think desperately of just the right bright word in answer, conveyed the impression of being tongue-tied. "Kiss me, Catherine!" he commanded.

"Good-by, Uncle Pete," Kate murmured, clearing her throat. She laid her flushed, lovely cheek against his for a moment, smiled at John, and preceded him to the big, gloomy front door.

The heroine of a hundred conquests, she simply could not think of anything to say. What to say—what to say—what to say——

"I was just thinking how long it was since I've seen you, Miss Kate. Wasn't it Christmas?"

"Yes, I guess it was." No guesswork about it for Kate; she could have

told him that that meeting had been supremely unsatisfactory, she could have told him exactly what he had said to her, and she to him, in the dullness and confusion of a large family party.

They walked in silence to the corner, stood under the street light waiting for the car. Kate hummed. Suddenly both spoke together.

"I beg your pardon——"

"No, you——"

"No, you——"

"I was just going to say that the cars never seem to be here when you want them." She halted. They interrupted each other again. "We just missed one!" Kate added. "But I interrupted you?"

"I was just thinking how lovely it is tonight; I like the Mission," John said. "In the spring you smell flowers here——"

"Lilacs," Kate supplied, looking up at the stars.

"Do you like the country?" the man asked.

"Well, I never lived there. Well, I did when I was a little baby," Kate remarked, with unbelievable dryness and difficulty. "But my mother and father died when I was quite young, and then my grandmother took me. I don't remember the country. We lived in Alameda."

"Here we are," John exclaimed, as the trolley hummed into view. "I'll tell you a very nice ride," he said, when they were wedged into a small seat outside, in the dark. "The scenic route to the beach, that's a beautiful ride. Don't you think so?"

He paid their fare as he spoke, and he did not ask for transfers. A dozen men Kate knew well would have taken transfers as a matter of course, and then coaxed her to take that same beach ride on such a golden spring night! They had only to stay where they were for a few blocks farther, and change at Sutter Street.

It never occurred to him! The girl's face burned. She turned the full battery of her glorious blue eyes upon him; he was so close that almost without moving she could have kissed that hard brown face of his, with its straight nose and thin-chiseled lips, and the burning, boyish black eyes. He wore shabby gloves; Kate had forgotten hers.

"Mrs Cunningham gave me those gloves at Christmas," John said, perhaps seeing her glance at them. "And I took it as a hint that she'd like me to wear them."

Kate grinned, plunged her own bare hands deep into her coat pockets. Why on earth couldn't she talk tonight? He would think she was half-witted.

"Stop at Turk," John directed the motorman. They were almost home. A glimpse of him on Christmas Day, and this was April! And Kate was twenty-one; in a few years it would be too late.

If she only dared say, "Let's hope we continue to see each other at least once every six months, John!" Did she call him John, anyway? If only she could laugh naturally and say, "Well, seeing each other this often there'll certainly be no talk about us, will there?"

Silently she walked at his side. They had taken the wrong car, in their nervous anxiety to take any car, and had two blocks, instead of a hundred feet, to walk. Kate prayed as she went: "God—make him interested in me!"

"Miss Cecilia doesn't look very well just now, does she?"

An opening at last. Her words came in a rush.

"She's terribly worried for fear—I guess you know that she wants to enter the convent? She's afraid Uncle Peter won't let her."

"I thought that was a year ago," John commented, slowly.

"He made her wait a year. But it's almost up now. Oh, God, have something happen to make him interested in me!" Kate said only the first two phrases aloud; the third rose silently in her heart.

"He spoke to me about it last spring. He's not spoken of it since," John said, briefly, after a slight pause.

"Well, she thinks he'll let her—next week," Kate assured him, mercilessly.

"She seems pretty young," the man offered, hesitatingly.

"Oh, I don't know. Cecy's twenty. Girls get married at that age!" Kate reminded him, airily. She was almost at her ease, spurred by the bitter sting of his interest in Cecy.

"Yes, that's so," John admitted, thoughtfully.

They turned Kate's corner.

"My God in heaven have mercy on us all!" the girl said, in a strangled voice. And she and John began to run.

The whole shabby block was alight. Fire engines were coughing and drizzling midway in the row of humble houses and cottages, and the unearthly red eyes of the hook-and-ladder wagon and the hot glow of intermittent flames illumined black and surging forms that moved and shouted, and picked out the white faces of a tensely watching crowd of boys and men, held in check by the police.

Kate rushed up, felt somebody's strong arm about her, caught a policeman by the arm.

"It's my grandma—it's my house—my God——!"

"It's only your shed roof cot, Kate!" shouted a perspiring and shirt-sleeved man, joining the group that immediately formed about her. "Your grandma's all right, she was givin' the boys what-for a minute back! It was Maloney's stable begun it, and they say the white funeral horses is burnt alive, God help the poor creatures, but your grandma and Miss Maggie was here a few minutes back. There's not a stitch of har'rm done your house, glory be to the everlasting glory of God Almighty!"

"You'd wondher," said a shrill, complaining voice, making itself heard through the general uproar, "you'd wondher that if me little place hasn't a stitch of hur'rt done to it, that thim lads wit' the hose would employ thimselves betther than they'd fill me little kitchen wit' their dir'rty watther."

The owner of the voice, a small and wizened woman of sixty-five or

seventy, with a shawl wrapped well about her head and shoulders, now looked with sharply blinking eyes at the group and said dispassionately: "Well, Kate."

"Grandma!" Kate exclaimed, embracing her thankfully. "My God, what a scare I got!"

"Aw-w-w-!" said all the boys in the crowd, disgustedly, in chorus, as a final inundation of the hose completely doused the last remnants of the flames. Darkness fell upon the surging masses of machinery and humanity, except when motor lights shone upon writhing and snakelike lengths of hose.

"Oh, Kate, we had a terrible time!" sobbed her Aunt Maggie, in easy tears. "Charley and Mama and I were in the kitchen——"

"And hadn't I run in to ask your mama how her rheumatism was," said a stout big motherly woman, solemnly. "I wasn't gone ten minutes when the whole thing broke out! I says to Nellie, when I got home: 'My God,' I says, 'it's a funy hour of night for Maloney to be cleaning his stable,' I says. With that Nellie looked out of the window, and the baby at her breast, the little innocent, 'Oh, God, Mary,' she says, 'the city's on fire!' With that my first thought was your poor old grandma, Kate, and I run out—look, in me old slippers, for I was changing me shoes——"

"Charley and Mama and I were in the kitchen, and Harry hadn't come in yet," Maggie Walsh said, shaking, and in a high, strained voice. "And Mama was just saying, 'Where's Kate, that she wouldn't be home——' "

"Maloney's took it very cool," a pimpled young boy said with something like regret.

"That's all, Mary, you've seen your fire, so now let's get out," said a male voice decisively, in the dark. Groups began to filter away; maternal voices here and there could be heard calling: "Hoo-hoo, Marg'ret! Em, have you Georgie? Hoo-hoo!"

The night air smelled of smoke and wet wood; as the unearthly lights faded, they could again see the quiet stars winking overhead. With a great snorting and puffing the fire motors turned and went away.

"The Chief was here, whoop! how he come sailin' around the corner," exulted some small boy. "Le'go, Ma," he whined, departing.

"They say there's a terrible lot of fires lately," bemoaned some old woman's gentle voice.

"Your lights light, Mrs Walsh!" sang out an officious youngster. "Me and Joe King went into your kitchen——"

"I'll bet me lights light, and I'll bet you young ones thraipsed all over the place while you was about it!" Kate's grandmother said, as she indignantly wended her way back into her own domain. "Look what they done to me!" she said, in a sort of stupefied wail, entering her kitchen.

"Well, leave it to them!" Kate said, with a great burst of laughter.

The dangling electric lights were indeed uninjured, and by their harsh glare the reëstablished family could look aghast upon the ruins about

them. In their enthusiasm the fire department had turned more than one spurting hose into the little place, had smashed more than one of the small window-panes.

The stove stood in a pool of black water, the table had been upset, and salt and sugar had streamed from their homely receptacles to mingle with the broken brown Rebecca teapot upon the floor. Some officious meddler, mounting the roof to inspect the chimney, had been responsible for the curly drifts of soot that wavered and fled before the draught from the opened door; the kettle had been overturned upon the cold stove, and water dripped forlornly to the worn linoleum mat.

Kate, John, Maggie Walsh, a tall stout bald man without a collar, whom John had just identified as Kate's Uncle Charley, and the angry little old woman, stared at the kitchen and then at each other.

"Well, they done it good whilst they was about it!" commented Maggie.

"You can't stay here tonight, Ma, I'll not permit it, it's not safe," Charley Walsh uttered, pompously. "I'll take you myself to some hotel."

Maggie looked somewhat impressed at this. That Charley had been a burden upon his mother and sisters all his fifty-two years made it none the less touching to Maggie that his heart was simply broke for poor Ma, the night they had the fire in Maloney's barn, and didn't he want to take her to a hotel? Maggie would add this detail to the solemn story of the night whenever she told it.

Kate shot her big, fat uncle a mother's look, a look all amusement and indulgence. And John Kelly saw it.

"Charley and I were here in the kitchen, and Ma was going to bed," Maggie was beginning again, on her high wail. "And Charley says, 'Why isn't Kate home? I'm going to 'phome Pete,' he says, and with that——"

"Who do they think they are, them hose and ladder boys?" Mrs Walsh demanded, upon a hard, loud tone. "Is Jimmy Daley the Pope, that he'll scare a God-fearing woman out of bed in the middle of the night like a coney that'd run out of a burrow itself?"

"I didn't know that was one of the Holy Father's privileges," John, raising the table, observed in an aside to Kate.

"Nor I. Live and learn," Kate murmured in response, with her delicious laugh. It was the first time they had joked together; she loved to see him flush so redly, and hear him laugh that reluctant laugh that seemed shaken out of him almost against his will.

"Leave it be, Mr Kelly, there's no use at all in your doing anything," Maggie protested. "It'll be weeks before we get it into any kind of shape again."

"Leave it just as it lays," Charley Walsh said in a majestic voice. "You carry some fire insurance, don't you, Ma? You leave it be, and I'll have O'Connor up here tomorrow morning. Don't touch it. You'll have it all back in damages."

"Thank God my brother's the one to know just how to handle all such

things, that'd be Greek to me," Maggie said piously to John, with deep satisfaction. "Charley has a regular gift for a title or a mortgage or whatever, and indeed my father did before him!"

"I happen to know the adjuster well—drinking with him yesterday," Charley Walsh admitted, modestly. "Don't touch it, Kate!"

"But we can't leave it like this!" Kate protested. "Where'll we get coffee in the morning?"

Her uncle nodded cryptically. "Leave that to me. We'll step round to Farley's in Fillmore Street," he announced, magnificently.

"Well, if the police and the Mayor will keep out of me room so that I'll get me beads said, I'll go to bed!" remarked the old lady, witheringly.

"I could do with a good hot cup of coffee now!" Kate chanced to say, cheerfully.

"Suppose you and I go round to Farley's and celebrate the fire!" John suggested, with his pleasant, almost bashful manner. Kate's eyes danced.

"You might ask Ken, there, would he send me back a pot of coffee," Kate's uncle suggested delicately, and Kate felt suddenly cold and weary. Of course he would end by going with them, the girl's heart said resentfully. Leave it to Uncle Charley!

"I won't go with you, you won't want me," Maggie said, pessimistically. "Unless I don't know whether your grandma would like your going around there so late with a young man," she added, hesitatingly. Kate felt an impulse toward murder. Grandma object! Why, she had been to Farley's with every one of twenty boys, and Grandma had paid no attention whatsoever!

Crimson with nervousness and anxiety she said: "We'll be right back."

"Insurance or no insurance," Maggie pleaded, with a deprecatory smile, "I think I'll have to make myself some coffee here, then. I feel real gone. I guess I had a good deal more scare than I thought, Kate not being here for the worst of it."

"Oh, come with us," John urged her. And Kate felt that she actually hated her good aunt when Maggie said, smilingly:

"Oh, say, listen, I'll be in your way!"

Be in their way! If looks could have withered, Maggie would have shriveled away under Kate's keen glance. But, upon John again inviting her, Maggie somewhat simperingly joined them.

"I think I'll go with you. I won't have anything to eat, but if I have to see O'Connor, it means I've got to get up in the morning," Uncle Charley now said, rather loftily. John and he led the way, and Kate's aunt took her arm, and snuggled up to her companionably, as she and Kate followed.

"My dear," murmured Aunt Maggie, "I hope we're not butting in! But you'll have to grant it's out of the common, driven out of the house with a fire scare, even though glory be to God eternally, none of us were killed outright!"

They went around the corner and into Farley's, a small, dimly lighted

restaurant in whose window an aged Chinese was frying oysters. There was a narrow counter in front of him, furnished with bowls of small crackers and bottles of catsup and salt, but the Walsh party penetrated into the body of the establishment where there were small tables.

A big Irishman, in a dirty, thick white linen coat, wiped the table before them, snapped up a single electric light, and greeted Charley.

"Hello, Charley."

"Hello, Ken," said Charley, gratified.

"Some fire you folks had tonight. Gene was tellin' me about it," said Ken, genially. "Old lady get a shock? I hope not."

"Mama was scared almost to death," Maggie said, solemnly. "Her and my brother and I were in the kitchen; well, no, to be exact my mother had gone to bed. But my niece here——"

"What'll you have, Mr Walsh?" John, the spattered card in his hand, was murmuring. "Coffee, Miss Kate? Miss Walsh, we're all having coffee. How about you?"

"I don't care what I have," Maggie said, heartily, "except that it's something hot to stay my stomach, for upon my word and honor I feel exhausted with the danger we were in."

"How about scrambled eggs? Miss Kate and I are having scrambled eggs," John suggested. Kate looked at his kindly, earnest face, a little flushed now with hospitality, and from him to her relatives, and she bitterly wished that she were dead. Other girls had homes, like Cecy's beautiful home, had mothers and fathers to stand back of them. She had Aunt Maggie, grizzled, her crimps coming straight and her hat on crooked, and big Uncle Charley, sprawling himself and his spotted tie and his blond, freckled, fat hands across the table!

"I don't think I'll have anything but the coffee, unless it's a few fried oysters, Ken," Uncle Charley said, with an air of conceding even this much appetite to the wishes of his host.

"If you have fried oysters I will, too," Maggie amended her order.

"And the scrambled eggs?" John asked her.

"Oh, good gracious, what kind of an appetite do you think I have!" Maggie protested, delightedly. John smiled sympathetically at Kate, and was struck by the quality of her beauty and gentleness and weariness.

"Kate, you've got a smooch acrost your face!" Aunt Maggie told her, following the look.

"I shouldn't wonder!" Kate answered, too tired even to smile.

The eggs and oysters and the smoking hot coffee had arrived and were in process of being slid before their prospective consumers by Ken, when the party was joined by another of Kate's uncles, Harry Walsh, a gentle, also bald man, of almost forty, but small and nervous, where Charley was large, soft, and pompous, and, on this occasion, slightly intoxicated.

"My God, Maggie," said the newcomer, in tears, "this is a fearful thing. Ma might have been burned alive on us! My mother is the dearest

thing in God's world to me," he said, solemnly, to John. "That little lady is all my world. Where were you and Charley and Kate, Maggie," he added, mildly querulous, "that the fire department would break in on her?"

"Oh, we've had a terrible night of it, Harry!" Maggie began, with her eyes filling again. "I guess there was seven or eight hundred come to watch it. Maloney's out three thousand dollars, someone was telling me, and the Chief and all! First thing we knew, Ma and Charley and I were in the kitchen, Kate was over to Pete's——"

"You'll have some coffee with us, Mr Walsh?" John asked, patiently. "We're all sort of celebrating our narrow escape!"

"I was with a friend, d'ye see?" Harry said, confidentially, in his ear. "A grand feller, mind you. His wife," he added, delicately, with a precautionary glance toward Kate, "she left him. Left him," said Harry, his eyes watering, "a man that never done a mean thing in his life! He had Bright's Disease ever since he went into the Spanish War, to fight for his country, and he lost his only child two years ago! You'd feel sorry for him——"

John glanced again toward Kate. But she was sitting with her elbow resting on the table, her cheek in her hand, and her thick lashes lowered. Her somber gaze was upon the spotted, damp, and rumpled tablecoth.

The coffee revived everybody, and Maggie and her older brother got into a cheerful gale of laughter and conversation. Harry drank strong black coffee sulkily, making occasional side remarks of a pessimistic nature to John.

"Do you know my father was Crocker's partner," Harry said, darkly; "my father ought to of been one of the richest men in this town!"

"Is that so?" John asked, with a glance at Kate. She raised heavy eyes, smiled. He had a sudden impulse to lay his hand for an instant over her own, where it lay idle beside her plate, and to give a second's sympathetic pressure.

"Pa was too honest, he never would have been a rich man the longest day he lived!" Maggie added, readily. "My father was a man thought well of the len'th and brea'th of the state," she went on, warmly. "He was his own worst enemy where money was concerned; did he have it, there was nobody could ask him for it he wouldn't hand it out to them, and with a 'God bless you' at that! 'The gates of heaven are standin' open for him,' said Mother Margaret Mary herself when he lay dyin' and my own mother layin' like a curd in the next room, the way we didn't know which one of them would go first! You'd never see a bigger funeral than my father's, Mr Kelly, unless it was a convention or a president coming to town," Maggie ended, with emotion, "and didn't we lay out my brother that was Kate's father, Robbie Walsh, that was really my half-brother but by reason of Ma marrying twice he always called her 'ma' to the day of his death, but three weeks and five days later?"

And Maggie stopped for want of breath, and raised her coffee cup, to look pathetically at John over its thick brim.

"You've surely had your share," John sympathized, seriously. During this rambling monologue he had been concerned to discover that Kate, whom he had always seen so self-reliant and happy, was hiding wet eyes.

Harry had quite frankly gone to sleep, his head against the wall, and Maggie, noticing him, apologized to the best of her ability.

"You'll have to excuse my brother, Mr Kelly," Maggie said, "he shouldn't of followed us here. But he's very tender-hearted, and he has a weak stomach, and when he's"—and Maggie's significantly raised eyebrow and tightened mouth added—"had a little too much"—"he's like this," she went on, aloud. "He'd never raise his hand to a fly," she added, loyally. "But"—again the eyebrow spoke volumes—"poison to him!" Maggie finished, hardly sounding the words as she formed them with her lips. "He ought never to touch it!"

"Come on, Harry, come on, Harry," Charley was saying. Harry roused himself with some reluctance, and asked permission to stand treat for the party. "Bring me that bill, Ken. Bring me that bill!" he kept saying, heavily.

"It's all paid, Harry dear," Maggie said, anxiously accompanying him. "Mr Kelly paid for it all, dear, and now next time he'll have to have a little supper with us!"

Kate did not speak, and although John ranged himself beside her in the dark street, she seemed entirely unconscious of his presence.

"This fire seems to have upset them," he murmured, kindly.

The girl made a little sound that might have been a brief laugh or a sniff; John glanced at her sharply, and in the mild moonlight he saw that the beautiful head was carried high, and there was a glint of tears on her thin young cheeks.

"We'll take Harry in, and leave you to say good-night to your young man; don't hurry, dear," Maggie suggested, with a great air of consideration and sympathy, at the gate. But Kate was beyond all desire to see John Kelly alone now; her one shamed and desperate prayer was that she would never see him in this life again. She gave him her cool hand, said a brief good-night, and accompanied her sorry group of kinspeople into the house.

The stuffy cottage rooms still smelled of smoke and acrid, singed wet wood. Old Mrs Walsh slept on an extension lounge in the parlor, with an enlarged crayon portrait of her late husband cheerful in curled hair, curled mustache, and checked suit, looking down upon her. Kate and Maggie shared a double bed in one bedroom, unless it chanced to be rented, when they occupied the dining room; the brothers had a similar bed in the other. There was no bathroom in the cottage, but a washroom beyond the kitchen, opening on a porch.

When Kate and her Aunt Maggie returned, dripping, and with braided hair, from the washroom, Harry was already deeply and noisily asleep, and Charley was smoking a cigarette in the dining room, as he awaited their convenience.

"Well, I hope we didn't scare the life out of that nice young Mr Kelly," Maggie, who had had reason to be disturbed by her niece's unnatural calm, said a little nervously, in their room. "Maybe it was terrible, all of us going along to Farley's that way, but what with the fright and all, I felt all at my wits' end! When he asked me so nice, the first thing I said was 'yes', and then I couldn't back out. I never knew Charley was coming, and as for poor Harry—but the way he talked I know he saw that Harry—felt bad. You don't think," she had to have it out, "you didn't mind my going, Kate?"

"It didn't matter." Kate, on her knees, clean and sweet in her plain nightgown and with a great rope of golden-brown hair hanging over her slender shoulder, said lifelessly. Her eyes stung with tears she would not let fall, her voice was thick.

"Kate!" Maggie exclaimed, puzzled. "You don't like young Kelly, do you?"

Kate raised weary eyebrows, opened the worn, thin prayerbook she had laid before her on the bed.

"It wouldn't matter much if I did, I suppose," she said, dully.

Maggie, honestly concerned, came about to Kate's side of the bed, and sat down beside her niece.

"Well, lovey, we don't have fires every night," she began, apologetic and distressed.

"No," Kate agreed, perversely, linking her slender fingers before her, and refusing to smile or look up. "But we have dirt, and poverty, and Uncle Harry getting drunk, and Uncle Charley——" "bumming meals off everybody," she was going on. But with an actual physical effort she stopped herself, and remained mutinously silent, staring away from Maggie across the wide, soggy bed.

"Now, Kate, you have a great deal," Aunt Maggie began. "Haven't you your Uncle Pete and Aunt Mollie that think the world and all of you, and your grandma that's almost a saint? And though the boys are not ones to make money, you'll never find a quicker mind than Charley Walsh has got, and pure—a priest told Ma once that our boys had the souls of children! My goodness, if you think you have troubles, Kate Walsh, what about me that was engaged——"

"Oh, I'm sick of it, sick of it, sick of it!" Kate broke out, in a bitter tone, hardly above a whisper, and as if she spoke to herself.

"Kate," Maggie pleaded, patiently, after a frightened silence, "look at me, that was going to be married to Frank Cahill, and had my bans called and everything, and the news in the evening paper that he'd been drowned——"

"Oh, I'm sick of Frank Cahill!" Kate muttered, as her aunt paused, overcome.

Tears filled Maggie's eyes and her lips trembled. She went to her own side of the bed and Kate knew she was crying.

As the girl opened her "Imitation," disgust and impatience seized her

like vertigo. Oh, horrible house, filled with poverty and laziness and stupidity and intemperance and dirt! Oh, dreary, ghastly life, that gave to some girls wealth and position, and the love of the finest of men, and to other girls all the helpless and sagging humiliations of such a family as hers!

What kind of "shanty Irish" would John Kelly think them! Kate's young face burned. Not that it mattered—nothing mattered. What would he think of them! He was probably laughing at them. Not that it mattered.

She looked across at Maggie, who was saying her rosary, her tearful eyes tight shut, her lean elbows sunk into the shapeless surface of the bed.

"Aunt Maggie, I'm sorry I said that about Frank Cahill," Kate apologized, ungraciously. Maggie faintly shook her head, and a great gulp moved in her throat.

The girl suddenly rose to her feet, slammed the little book firmly down upon the table, and sprang into bed. She buried her head in the covers, lay there curled in a ball, overwhelmed by her own furious mood, and swept by bitter and confused heartache.

"Kate," Maggie said, solemnly, after a few brightly lighted, silent moments. "Didn't you read your 'Imitation'?"

"No," Kate said, briefly, from her cocoon.

"Catherine Walsh! I thought you were doing it every night this month, for an intention?"

"I was," Kate admitted, grimly, without stirring.

Maggie was stupefied. She finished her own prayers; tried again.

"Kate——" A pause. Then, sharply: "Kate——"

"Well, what is it?"

"Do you want to lose your intention?"

"No, and I'll never get it that way, nor for praying for it, and I'm sick and tired of praying!" Kate said, in angry tears. "And if you say another word to me, I'll get up and march out of this house, and I wish I was dead!" she finished.

Maggie was silent. She went to the window, dingily curtained in streaked and torn Nottingham lace, and opened it. She wound the nickel clock, and set it for seven, she snapped off the electric light that dangled nakedly in the center of the shabby room.

"Kate dear," she said in the darkness, when she was in bed, "I was thinking that if I do good with my dressmaking this summer, we'll have some little dinner parties next fall. You'd like that, wouldn't you? I'll cook my chicken pie, that always comes out so good, and I'll tell you what we'll do—we'll ask that nice Mr Kelly, shall we? Would you like that, Kate? It's only right that you should have your pleasures."

Kate lay motionless. Her heart was one great ache of pity and shame. Poor shabby Aunt Maggie, struggling in the dreary dining room with sewing machine and tissue-paper patterns, yet trying to plan so generously and spontaneously! Kate smelled, in the spring dark, the lemon

that Maggie always kept to whiten her hands, and always lay rubbing upon them, when she first got into bed. She heard the click of Maggie's dental plate, about which her aunt was extremely sensitive, and which was only slipped into its place in a handleless teacup after the lights went out. And she heard Maggie say:

"I'm sorry about tonight, dear. Don't feel bad, Kate. We'll have some real good times if we don't have any sickness to put us back; this summer——"

Silence. Kate hated herself for breathing heavily as if asleep. But it seemed to ease the cruel hard pain in her own heart, somehow to lift the day's humiliating total of failures and shame, to hurt Maggie.

Her intention! She thought of it with a bitter, writhing motion of her lips. She had been praying, since Christmas, that somehow she and John Kelly would come to be friends! She had been reading a chapter of the "Imitation" every night, with that for her "intention"!

It was much later, after as painful a long hour of thought as her healthy youth had ever known, that she slipped cautiously from the bed and slid to her knees. The moon was gone now, and the world outside was chilly; it must be nearly two o'clock, Kate thought solemnly. It had been after midnight when they were drinking their coffee in that disgusting restaurant.

She would not read the "Imitation"; she was done with intentions for a while! But she dared not sleep until she had said her prayers.

Afterward she went noiselessly about the bed, and leaned over Aunt Maggie. And instantly Maggie's lean, empty arms came up, and they kissed each other. Both faces were wet.

"Kate, dear—to have you unhappy—it kills me—you're all the world to me, dear——" Aunt Maggie whispered, crying.

"I'm a beast!" Kate whispered back. And purified and meek, and broken in body and soul, she crept into her own place, and gave one great sigh, and one deep sob, and was asleep.

CHAPTER V

THERE was great excitement in the Cunningham household on the night of the municipal ball. Only Cecilia and her father were attending, to be sure, and Peter's much considered, rehearsed, and discussed "speech" was to consume at most a mere three minutes; Peter was listed on the programme under the general heading: "Greetings from our new Commissioners: William Bundschu, George G. Potter, Peter J. Cunningham, J. M. Moretti."

Yet it was a pleasant and flattering event in Peter's life, and it was Cecy's first big party—and Cecy's last, if the girl herself, dressing now in her big, brightly lighted front room, had anything to say about it.

Neither Cecy's father nor her mother had had any idea, until this week,

of the stubborn lines the little rosebud of Cecy's mouth could assume, nor the cold grayness that could film her honest young blue eyes. She wanted to enter the convent. Sister expected her. Everyone knew she was going to enter the convent. Cecy couldn't see why Mama and Papa, after all this time, should suddenly begin to object now.

Papa had said a year. Now the year was ended. Papa had expected her to change her mind, and she hadn't changed her mind. There was nothing more to be said.

Cecy's father and mother would gladly have agreed to the last clause; too much, far too much, had already been said! But, although their course and their daughter's looked so clear, and although they were not, in the sense of analysis and study, educated parents, each felt vaguely that there was more to a religious vocation than appeared in this case.

More than just childish good intentions and romantic youth; more than just wanting to become a postulant.

Cecilia, when all was said and done, was extremely young, even for twenty. She had a curious quality of unreality still, of ignorance, of untouchedness, and both parents, although they could not have expressed it, felt it strongly. She was too ready with her pat little consolatory phrases, too much engrossed in the thought of her curly braids, her plain serges, and sunlight falling in the convent chapel upon her veiled head.

"You'll miss your mother and sister," Peter warned her.

"Oh, Papa, but think of the wonderful mother and sisters I'll have all about me!"

"The time may come, lovey, when you'll want a home and babies of your own!"

"I'll have a whole classroom full of them!" And Cecilia would laugh the bright, confident, childishly ignorant laugh that made her father so profoundly uneasy. In his rather slow brain Peter sometimes mused about it. Could "them good Sisters," he wondered, really escape friction and petty worries, escape, in a word, reality? Well, maybe they could. Maybe they could. Maybe they could keep a child like this dear blue-eyed, curly-headed little saint of his always happy, always busy, always good.

His wife had carried a girlish innocence, ignorance, and purity triumphantly through experiences staggering to contemplate; she had remained mysteriously unstained through her girlhood in the slatternly house of Walsh, through her brothers' bouts with intemperance, through one or two experiences even more disillusioning, in the history of the "Walsh boys"; she had been a dignified young wife, she had faced dangerous confinements serenely, and she still could be shocked, and wince at certain words, as a girl might. Nobody talked coarsely or even carelessly before Mollie; Peter never told her even the most innocent of his friends' jokes.

Armed thus with some invisible protection, in all the soil and sordidness of the world, might Mollie quite unconsciously have given her daughter similar sheltering wings, wings that would hold little Cecy safe in her cloister?

"She'd take a chanct, marryin'," Peter reminded his wife.

"Yes, but there's real things right away, when you marry," Mollie answered, with unexpected shrewdness. "There's rent, and your family, and presents, and maybe your first one coming. But in the convent it's all in your mind, or your soul."

Mollie had been deeply impressed by the American "Mother Superior," one of whose rare visits to the convent had been paid this Eastertime. Mother Superior had been Mollie's school chum, Sarah Toosey, twenty-five years ago; she had lived over a grocery in Valencia Street. But she was a very important personage now. She was large, spectacled, brisk, quiet, authoritative in demeanor. She could estimate a rent, the site of a building, the potential qualities of a raw little girl, with the eye of an expert.

Mollie she had kissed on both cheeks, with tears of pleasure in her bright eyes; at Cecilia she had smiled shrewdly: "This is the good child that is waiting for Papa's permission, is it?" she had asked.

Cecy had been transported with ecstasy. But later, Mother Superior had assured Mollie, in twenty firm, regretful words, that she did not think the child had the true vocation.

"She's a good child, but it's *natural* goodness, Mollie. Sister tells me that your Cecilia was never disciplined or punished—never did a penance in her life. Let her try it, of course, if you like. But I think we had better wait to see what the Holy Spirit is going to do with her."

This had been a thunderbolt to Mollie; she had not dared to tell Cecy. It would cloud the girl's first happy days as a postulant, upset her and distress her as it was upsetting and distressing her mother. Mollie had been wavering before this, now she was in a wretched state of indecision.

Meanwhile Pete rehearsed his greeting, and Cecy's dress was finished, and the night of the Municipal Dinner and ball came. And with it came Kate and Maggie Walsh, to see Cecy in all her glory, and remain behind to dine quietly with Mollie and the children.

Kate, calling a joyous greeting in all directions, flew up to Cecy's room; the family began to filter through halls and doorways in that direction. The May night was soft and bright, there was still lingering daylight in the streets.

But Cecy had the shades drawn, and the lights lighted, and was posed fixedly before her mirror, while her mother and Aunt Allie lifted the new dress above her head.

Her eyes moved toward Kate and Aunt Maggie in the mirror, as they entered, but she did not turn. Ellen and Mart and Paul, hanging upon the visitors, disposed themselves upon the sofa, and all eyes were fixed admiringly upon Cecy's young figure, in the satin petticoat and lacy corset-cover, and the cloud of gauze and glitter that was sliding slowly down over her raised bare arms.

"Mother of pearl, what a dress!" Kate said, under her breath.

"Do you like it, Kate?" Mollie asked, exhaustedly dropping her big

arms, and panting, as Allie conscientiously scowled through her glasses at hooks and snaps. "I've fussed with it so and then we had to change the whole skirt, and poor Maggie coming back last night at eight o'clock—I'll never forget it of you, Mag—I know that——"

"Aunt Allie, ought that catch like that?" Cecy demanded, anxiously, looking down over her own shoulder.

"It's all right, dear. Just leave me hook it," Allie murmured.

"Mama, *is* it all right?" Cecy further demanded, unconvinced.

Aunt Allie gave place, and her mother and Aunt Maggie nervously examined the shoulder.

"It's caught in the lace there, Allie. It's all fixed, lovey."

"Well, I knew *that,*" Aunt Allie said, witheringly, with a significant glance for Kate. "If you'd leave me finish it, before you began pickin' flaws in it——"

Cecilia had on her new white satin slippers, pearled with crystal beads. Her white silk stockings were new; everything she wore was new, and had been laid out on the bed since two o'clock, in careful order. She had no evening coat, and was originally to have worn her mother's heavy one, and later decided on Kate's, the old pink silk one with the swansdown collar.

But only an hour ago her father had brought her a new coat, in a big Emporium box, a coat of pale rose satin with a ravishing soft high collar of white fur. Cecilia had never had so sumptuous a garment in all her twenty years. Quite pale with emotion she had tried it on, over her old house dress, and afterward had flung herself into her gratified father's arms, entirely unable to express her enthusiasm and gratitude.

It was already promised, in an aside, to Ellen, "when I enter," and Ellen had already whispered this great news to Kate. But Peter and Mollie did not know that, and both parents felt a deep satisfaction in Cecilia's reception of the gift.

"*Her* enter?" Peter, shaving, had said incredulously. And even Mollie had felt enormously reassured.

"There, now, how do you like it, Kate? How do you like it, Allie?" Mollie demanded now, as completely hooked and straightened, Cecilia revolved slowly before the mirror, and faced them with shy and yet deeply complacent eyes.

Pink gauze, silver gauze, pink roses and transparent silver lace, pink points standing out stiffly like the petals of a rose, and silver scallops lying flat against the smooth girlish breast. And above them, Cecy's round cheeks, flecked with gold freckles, blazing with excitement and self-consciousness, and Cecy's silky black curls all gathered under a knowing little silver band embellished with tiny satin roses.

"You look like a doll out of a box," Kate said, generously.

"Oh, Kate, I wish it was you going!"

"Not any more than I do, dear," answered Kate, and they all laughed.

"Try your new coat on over it, darling."

"Look at the way she puts it on, you'd think she was a duchess," Aunt Maggie said, admiringly. And indeed Cecy, inspired by her own elegance and beauty, had caught up the rose-pink garment with a real dash, and was looking coquettishly over the big white collar.

"Mag, you never made a prettier dress than that in your life!"

"Well, I don't know as I ever did. I kinder think now it would have looked good with the points hanging a little further down."

"Go show yourself to your papa," Mrs Cunningham directed her eldest daughter, her tone brimming with pride.

"Don't she look too saucy in it?" Maggie murmured, as she left the room.

Kate and Ellen accompanied her across the hall, the others followed. Peter was struggling with his white tie before his mirror.

"Look here, Uncle Peter, what do you think of your daughter?"

"How do you like me, Papa?" And Cecy revolved again before him, demurely fanning open the beautiful coat, to display the pink and silver glories beneath.

"Well, say—well, I guess we've got a society lady here tonight, Mama, sure enough!" Peter said to his wife, raising his bushy eyebrows to their highest, and forming his freshly shaven cheeks and his big mouth into a whistling position. "You look very lovely, darlin'," he added, sincerely. "Kiss Papa. Mollie, have I got another of these ties?"

"Why don't you go down and show Bessy and Ida and Annie, they're so interested!" Mollie suggested in a coaxing undertone.

"Oh, Mama, I'd rather not!"

"Oh, come on!" urged Kate. And as the younger element streamed downstairs, Peter was left to wrestle with his tie, and Mollie and the other women went back into Cecy's room.

Presently the girl returned, trying to talk naturally and simply with the brimming sense of her own beauty and importance distracting her. The minutes dragged by, with the women's desultory conversation constantly coming back to Cecy and the dress, until Peter was heard shouting: "There's the car outside. Come on, Cecy!"

Cecy rose, and Kate picked up the coat. But first the younger girl moved quickly across the room and opened her wardrobe door. As the big, overweighted panels and mirrors swung out, they could see her neat dresses and skirts hanging within.

She caught out her plain little new serge, her postulant dress, and laid it for a moment to her glowing cheek.

"This is my *real* party dress!" Cecy said, half playfully, all impulsively. And with a flashing, serious look about the group, she slipped into her new coat and ran out to join her father.

"Her little convent dress, that's where her heart is!" Maggie said, laughing with wet eyes.

"That's all she cares about," Allie nodded solemnly. "Off to dances and balls, her heart is that of a saint, that one."

"The dear child, she don't seem able to think of nothing else!" Mollie said. But Kate, honest and clear-sighted, experienced a secret little feeling for Cecy that was new. For the first time she realized that her little cousin really had no vocation at all, nor anything else; that Cecy was simply a sweet, admiration-loving young creature charmingly playing a part.

"She'll not enter, but she'll get John Kelly yet!" Kate thought.

"Ma's all over that scare the other night," Mollie stated rather than asked, as they all wended their slow way downstairs. She had had the whole story several times; Mollie saw her old mother almost every day. But it would serve as conversational food for all time to come, none the less.

"Maloney come over to see her today, to ask about her insurance," Maggie said. "I told you that. Charley thinks Ma will get a hundred and seventeen dollars, for the shed. Lucky for her Nelsons kept their old Ford in there, these last few months, so Ma could swear that we had use for it."

"Oh, say, what'd the doctors tell Min Nelson?" Allie demanded, interestedly.

"They said they couldn't tell. But old lady White told Ma that Min's mother went the same way, only her lump was on the other side. Clara says she thinks Min knows, knows perfectly well. She says Min was over to Crowleys' the other day, and Gert Crowley was talking about poor Stella Mahoney——"

They were off. Kate played naughts-and-crosses silently with Ellen and Mart, exchanging comments in pantomime, as the conversation settled down to a steady gait that would only be interrupted, but by no means destroyed, when Grace came to the door to say "Dinner is served when you are."

Cecy's place at the banquet was at the speakers' table; she felt a natural thrill of pride when her father was directed to find his name there, and when she followed him through a great banquet room that was already filling with men.

"You'll find your card marked 'Mrs Cunningham,'" the delightful young man who guided them told her. "We thought it was your mother that was coming!"

"She doesn't care much for this sort of thing," Peter explained, with a benignant nod, and the young man nodded sympathetically too, as if he understood.

It was all exciting and novel; the long tables spread flat with flowers, the waiters threading the confusion, the men and women filtering their way through the chairs, looking for cards and reservations.

Cecy saw Elizabeth Hunter, who used to go to the convent, and was married now, and Elizabeth waved back smilingly. Cecy felt proud that Elizabeth should see her at the speakers' table, even though she was far down toward the end of it.

Peter was on one side of his daughter; on the other was a card saying "George F. Taylor." Cecy knew who he was, one of the richest men in the state, and with a wife who was a society leader.

"Papa——"

"Just a minute, dear. That gentleman wants to speak to me. What is it, Joe?" muttered Peter, moving away. Peter was in his glory, magnificent in evening dress, recognized everywhere, and in demand. "Wait until they get the coffee 'round, and then keep them moving!" Cecilia heard her father say. "You'll get these front tables out of here as quick as you can, Pontuni," he charged the head waiter.

"Yes, Mr Cunningham. The minute you give me the signal, sir."

"Well, I or Mr Forster will."

"Yes, sir. I'll be watching you both, sir." The head waiter snapped his fingers, strained upon his toes to attract the attention of some underling far away. Peter turned back.

"What was it, lovey?"

"What are those big bags, hanging over the lights in the corners, Dad?"

"Those are for flashlights, dear."

"Papa, is this man next to me—look! It says 'George Taylor.' Is that the rich George Taylor?"

"That's the one. He gave the lot, you know, where we're going to build. But I guess you'll have a blank seat there; someone was telling me he was sick in bed. You're Mr Taylor's boy, aren't you?" Peter added, in a friendly voice, as an irreproachably clad young man came to the chair next Cecy, and after a brisk inspection picked up the name card. "You don't remember me. Cunningham is my name."

"How do you do, Mr Cunningham?" the youth said, easily, with a smile.

"My daughter, Miss Cunningham," Peter pursued.

"Miss Cunningham," Dion Taylor echoed again. "I'm here representing my father, and I wish devoutly that I had died in my happy innocent childhood!" he added, gaily, appreciative eyes upon Cecy. "I have a report to read."

"My father has to make a speech," Cecy stated, shyly, as Peter turned away again.

"Let's sit down and watch the animals come in," young Taylor suggested, amiably. He drew her chair out for her and they sat down.

Cecy had hitherto been only interested and amused; now, sitting so comfortably above the level of the main floor, looking down at the struggles of the later and less fortunate comers, and chatting with this delightful companion, she began to be really happy, with a queer breathless sort of happiness she had never known before.

Dion looked down at her firm, rosy, honest childish face, with its gold powdering of freckles; he liked the blue flame of her eyes when she raised them suddenly. The little breasts beneath the silver lace and pink gauze were flat and unformed, her arms had the sweet softness and roundness

of a child's arms. He liked the cadences in her voice, too, the lovely hint of a Celtic burr here and there. "Lord, what a little lily!" he said to himself more than once.

Dion Taylor was less than thirty. But he was a hundred years older than Cecilia in soul. He was handsome, brown-haired, tall, "taller than Pop and fully as tall as Tom," Cecy had already decided. He had laughing brown eyes and a sophisticated mouth. He wore his evening clothes as nobody else in the room could wear them, and his conversation smacked of the world: colleges, ocean liners, studios in Paris and New York. He was rich, he associated only with rich people, and was the youngest member of a very young firm of brokers.

Cecy looked up at him shyly, and he looked ardently down at her, and the old, old miracle had its way with them both. Presently they were no longer talking, they were murmuring, and Cecy was marking the table with little squares with her fork.

By this time most of the speeches had been made, and the room was a sea of confusion, with tables and chairs jammed together irregularly, and men sitting at all angles. Cecilia's heart had beaten hot and fast when her father stood up, and she had looked down at her locked hands in insufferable nervousness, and framed with her unconscious lips the phrases he had rehearsed before her only last night.

But Peter went successfully through his ordeal, and the loyal little daughter could breathe again.

"Papa, you were wonderful! You were the best of all."

"Oh, come, come. You mustn't say that. I had nothin' at all to do tonight! Sometimes they make me—— What is it, dear?"

"Papa, they're dancing beyond there, in the next room, and Mr Taylor asked me to dance!"

"Well, go ahead, go ahead, lovey. You don't want to hear this about the franchises—no, of course you don't. Have a good time!"

Just threading the crowd with young Mr Taylor was thrilling; he was so slim, so elegant, so tall, he made his way so deftly. He did not even look at Cecy as they reached the fringes of the crowd, he simply extended his arms in a businesslike way, and Cecy went into them.

Dion Taylor danced beautifully; Cecy felt that she had known he would. Without effort, smoothly, he seemed to be carrying her about like a piece of thistledown. It was evident that he liked to dance, for he did not talk as they circled and swayed, and he applauded vigorously when the music stopped.

Cecy started to applaud, too, saw that none of the other women did, and stopped abruptly, turning scarlet. Her companion saw her confusion.

"Clap if you want to," he said, carelessly. "What do you care what these poor simps do? Your little finger is worth more than the whole crowd put together!"

He said it so quietly, pocketing his handkerchief as he did so, and taking her coolly into his arms again, that Cecy was stirred to her soul.

"Thank God I dance well—thank God I dance well!" she breathed, fervently, in the depths of her being. It was perhaps as sincere a prayer as she had ever uttered.

The dances were endless, each was followed by a dozen brief encores, yet when the first was ended, Dion made no move to leave her, but negligently remarked that the musicians would start up again immediately.

"And don't you want to dance with—somebody else?" the girl asked, shyly.

"Me? No," he answered, with a surprised glance. "I'm only staying on your account."

Again in his arms, Cecy was conscious of shaking and trembling, of the vague scent of him, his buttonhole and his fine linen, his fresh young face and the smell of his hair. He smiled down at her, after his last remark, and Cecy was emboldened to say provokingly, with her powdered, radiant little face close to his tall shoulder:

"But suppose *I* might?"

"You might what, Cecilia?" the man said without effort. "Be lucid, my child."

"Suppose *I* might want to dance with somebody else?" Cecy explained.

"We'll suppose nothing so idiotic," Dion answered, calmly. The music stopped, and sauntering leisurely along with the crowd and clapping briskly, he added, in a ruminative tone: "No, you like me better than any man you ever saw, and when you can dance with me, you'll not dance with anybody else! So that," he ended, opening his arms for the encore, "that's *that*."

It was all fairyland, the music, the lights, the scents and sounds that whirled about her in one glorious and golden haze. Cecy was transported to some country her foot had never touched before; yet she knew the language, and with great hungry breaths she drew in the enchanted air.

What was happening? Did he like her? Did most girls dance every one of their dances with the same man, at their very first party?

Dion took her to the lemonade bowl, and she drank nectar; he led her to a cooler hallway, and fanned her with his handkerchief, and talked to her, and his words were like magic words dripping with fire and starshine as they fell.

Her father with a strange man in tow found her here; it was midnight. Mr Cullen, my daughter Cecilia. Mr Cullen, Mr Taylor. It was midnight, dear, and Mr Cullen wanted a dance with her. Mr Cullen knew her cousin Kate. And after this dance they must go.

Bewildered with pain and confusion, Cecilia changed dancing partners. Dion had disappeared; this horrible, perspiring, red-faced man was maundering on about Kate, like the fool he was. Cecilia hated him, she could hardly bring herself to speak to him.

"It's the same dance," he said, clapping.

"But I think Papa's waiting for me."

"Well, let's dance 'round to the door, anyway——"

She walked up to her father with a haughtily held head and hot cheeks.

"They're encoring it," said the offensive Cullen.

"Here's my coat ticket, Papa; do I get it, or do you?"

"I'll get it, dear. You finish your dance with Richard.

"Do you come often to parties, Miss Cunningham?"

"I didn't hear you."

"Do you like these big parties?"

"Oh, these parties. Oh. Well, I'm tired now, I guess."

"I almost called you 'Cecilia' when your father did, because we used to live out in the same block in the Mission. I went to school with your brother Tom, and I remember once you came over to our house, and my sister Mary took you home. You weren't but four——"

"I don't remember."

She went up to her father in the next interval.

"Papa, I'm kind of tired."

"Well, here's your coat then, lovey, and say good-night to Richard."

"Finish this with me, like a sweet girl——" She already knew the accents of that quiet, finished voice. Dion was behind her; in another instant they were out on the polished floor again.

Oh, exquisite happiness and confidence and normality returned! Her voice came naturally, her glances were balanced, poised, once more. Her feet were winged.

"Are you glad I waited for you, Saint Cecilia?"

"Yes." She looked up, against his shoulder, looked down.

"In the telephone book, of course?"

"Are—do you mean—oh, yes, of course we are!"

"Here's Miss Cunningham, danced to rags," Dion said, returning her to her father, and taking her coat to hold it charmingly. "Good-night, Mr Cunningham, good-night, Mr Cullen. Good-night——"

He had her little hand, he lingered just a second over it, and Cecy looked up like a wearied rose from the big white fur collar. Then he was gone.

She was silent in the limousine, silent when she got home. Her mother came into her room to kiss her, to unhook carefully the pink and silver dress.

"Quarter to one! Look at that now. And did you have a good time, my darling?"

"Lovely."

"And did you dance, dear?"

"Oh, yes, Mom." Cecilia opened her clean nightgown like the calyx of a lily; slipped her weary little body into it.

"She had young Cullen bowled over," Peter said, yawning, and removing his collar with a shriek of linen. "Don't send that to the wash no more, Mama," he directed, tearing it viciously in two. "For an hour he was hangin' around," he continued, "waitin' to meet her. He said she was for ever dancin'."

"Then you did have a good time, lovey?" Mollie repeated, surprised and delighted. "I thought you would, when you and Papa were so late."

Cecilia smiled, stepped out of the little ring of fragrant sweet clothing that slipped down under her nightgown.

"I said your decade for you," Mollie told her, lovingly superintending the final collapse between the smooth sheets.

"Oh, thank you, Mom——"

They were gone at last; she could hear their ruminative murmurs across the hall. The big room, with windows opened to the airy darkness of the night, was empty at last; she was alone, except for Ellen, whose bed was in a corner.

Cecilia settled herself upon her pillows, crossed her bare arms behind her head. She lay straight, motionless, utterly content. The panorama of the last few marvelous hours began to unroll itself smoothly, like some old Chinese scroll that is thinly wrapped length after shining length upon a polished wooden pole.

She was arriving at the banquet room, in her pink and silver dress. She was searching, in interest and yet with indifference, for her own place. A young, tall man was beside her, searching his own. Dion Taylor.

And then on—on—on, through all her treasury of remembered glorious moments. Cecilia had her favorites, and when, in the orderly sequence of her memories she found herself approaching the moment when Dion had bent upon her that quietly appraising look, when his voice had lowered itself upon that note of odd husky amusement, earnestness, mischief; when, at some word of hers as they danced, he had brought her whole body suddenly and firmly nearer his own, Cecilia would almost suffocate with sheer felicity.

She lay awake, quietly and deliberately, all night. Most of the time she was quite unconscious that it was night, that she was tired. She seemed to be floating, or suspended in ether. Her clock struck and struck; it meant nothing to her. The instant she had finished the procession of her recollections, she recommenced it again, with an unabated thrill.

So morning came, opal and soft and warm, with the whole city steeped in spring radiance. Cecilia saw it come, over the pleasant gardens and trees of the neighborhood. She heard the clock strike seven, and long after Ellen had dressed and crept away, she sneezed, hanging on her window sill.

Twenty minutes later her mother and Aunt Allie crept into her room.

"She's sound," Mollie murmured, regretfully, over her daughter's tumbled black curls. "God love her, I think I'll leave her lay! I was going to walk up to the convent with her, to have a talk with Sister. But she's tired out, my poor little nun! Papa says she was the belle of the ball. All I could tell Sister anyway is that Pete wants she should stay home until August, when Tom gets home."

"I'll have them keep her coffee hot," Allie remarked, drawing a shade.

Cecilia lay motionless. She did not feel deceitful. She only wanted them

to go away. And when they did go away she fell genuinely asleep, and awakened in the unearthly quiet of a deserted house some hours later.

Ellen and Mart and Paul were all away at school; Papa downtown, of course, and Mama and Aunt Allie at church or shopping. It was delicious to Cecilia to know herself still alone.

She loitered downstairs, lingered over a breakfast she only crumbled. When the telephone rang her heart began to thump; otherwise she was still in a dream.

When her mother came in, to talk concernedly about the fresh delay in vocation plans, Cecilia was lying on a couch, pretending to read a story she was totally incapable of following. She listened to her mother's recital absently, sweetly. Mollie told her husband later that the child took it remarkably well.

"Sister said that if it was God's will, a few months more or less would make no difference at all, dear, and you'd have the summer with all of us, and go in in the fall," Mollie explained, fearfully.

Cecilia smiled; "over a breaking heart," Aunt Allie suggested later. But actually it was all strangely distant and unreal to the girl: the family, their healthy noisy voices, the things they talked about. The convent was merely a big gray building; "Sister" was one of the excellent nuns there, for whom Cecilia had a vague regard.

"You see, Tom'll be home in the autumn, Cecy. It'd break his heart if you weren't here."

"I know, Mama." Cecy's thoughts were already tugging toward freedom, silence. There was something she wanted to think about, something she must think about.

After that there was no more talk of a religious vocation for her. And within a week or two all of the members of the big family knew that Cecy had a real beau, one of the rich Taylors, and Ellen and Mart looked curiously at her, as she went upon her absorbed and starry-eyed way.

CHAPTER VI

KATE INNOCENTLY CONTRIBUTED to the second stage of the affair, when Cecy came into the Public Library branch where Kate was desk-clerk, on the second morning after the memorable municipal ball. Dion had telephoned the Cunningham house the day before, and some servant had told him that everybody was out. It was because of this unspeakable tragedy that Cecy's face was pale this morning, and her manner languid.

Her cousin's dark, shabby, littered desk was in the center of the room, a room that ramified into a score of dark alcoves and that was lighted by an enormous window that gave directly upon a dingy street. The two librarians, however, Kate and an older woman named Schultz, kept the place as inviting as possible; shallow crisp white muslin curtains were

ruffled across the lower third of the window, and there were begonias and geraniums in pots, blooming all the year round.

Above Kate's beautiful head a large clock solemnly marked the hours, and behind two dusty high windows that cut through the crowded cases at the back of the room rose high brick factory walls from whence sounded shrill whistles at noon and at five o'clock.

But these whistles meant nothing to Kate. Her duties began, three days a week, at nine o'clock in the morning, and she was on duty on those days until half-past three. On the three other days she began at three, and locked the Library at half-past nine o'clock in the evening. And on Sundays both librarians were there from two o'clock until five.

For luncheon, she had the freedom of a small storeroom back of the reading room, where old periodicals and shabby, coverless books awaited the binder, and where there was a gas ring, and a few small saucepans and plates. Even while attending the desk, in the quiet noon hour, Kate could start chocolate and toast here, or boil an egg, and later consume them with one eye upon the library desk and another upon whatever book at the moment engrossed her.

For the rest, she roamed about checking or searching missing volumes, or sat in her comfortable revolving chair, with the long oak drawer full of stout paper slips and little wooden markers always under her hand. Kate would flip open a book, extract its identity slip, bring down her rubber stamp briskly and evenly, extend the volume to its borrower, and usually add a smile and an encouraging "It's good," before she turned to the next comer. She made a great many more mistakes than did Miss Schultz, but she was more popular. Both women were conscientious, interested in what the schoolgirls read, and vigorous in their protest when some improper book accidentally strayed to their shelves. With her pale gray eyes stony behind their strong glasses and her big German mouth firm, Miss Schultz could blandly deny the mere existence of any book she disapproved, even though it lay under the counter, not six inches away from her big, knuckly hand, all the while.

"I said 'You didn't see it here! There's no book of that name here,' " she would exultingly report to Kate later, when she was untying her silesia apron and Kate was donning her own. "But I had my fingers in my purse all the time, and that's what I meant by 'here,' do you see? And I says to her, 'Tell me the name again,' and I squinched up my eyes like I was trying to remember it, do you see? But I never lied to her!"

Kate always loved to have any member of the family come in while she was on duty. She kept good books ready for Ellen or Mart, and if Paul came in, friendly and bewildered, beside his mother, she made much of him, kneeling to kiss him, and leading him about to see the pictures hanging here and there on the walls: the octopus, and the Panama Canal, and the Big Fair. For a time, when Kate had some fish larvæ in a stagnant bowl of weedy water, Mart used to bring Paul in three

times a week, to see the fascinating silvery atoms whisk about in their jelly cells.

Straightening her desk and sharpening her pencils, and quite contentedly busy this soft, warm morning, Kate beamed upon Cecy, as the younger girl came in with an armful of books.

"That's Mart's 'Second Jungle Book' that Papa paid for, it was behind the wardrobe, but Papa says never mind the credit, it's all in a good cause!" Cecilia said, in a somewhat lifeless tone, sitting down, and panting, her face flushed, and the dark little curls on her temples wet from the heat.

The two girls exchanged, or rather reviewed, such family news as was available; there was always fresh news, even though Kate had been at the Cunningham house the evening before, and Mollie had telephoned Aunt Maggie before breakfast this morning.

"I'll tell you who's up there, on the balcony looking up something in the encyclopedia," Kate presently stated, indifferently, with a backward jerk of her head. "Didn't you say you met young Dion Taylor at that ball?"

The tempered summer light in the room blinked dizzily in Cecy's eyes, and she felt her mouth salty, and her hands chill. A sick sort of cramp seized her.

"Their office is only three blocks away, you know," Kate resumed. "This one is overdue two days, that's ten cents," she remarked, dispassionately, to a shabby little woman who stood mutely offering her two dark, bulky volumes.

"I'll be looking up a book," Cecy murmured, her heart choking her.

"I'll tell her. It's my landlady's books, and she never said anything to me about it," she heard the little woman say in a faintly complaining tone, as she moved away.

The encyclopedias were upstairs, ranged upon low shelves on a deep, gloomy deck that was quite invisible from the floor below. A tall, well-built young man, with a bent brown head over which a light dangled, had one of them opened upon a crooked knee, and was reading absorbedly, when Cecy came up.

Half an hour later, passing her desk, young Taylor made an agreeable impression upon Kate by saying audibly, and with a pleasant smile, "Thank you." And a little later still Kate was astonished to have Cecy appear, with a volume.

"Cecy! I thought you'd gone long ago."

"I was reading," Cecy explained, throbbing, thrilling, shaking from head to foot, suffused with ecstasy and bewilderment and all the beauty and glory of life.

"Listen, Cecy, this is Browning. A girl who comes in here from Berkeley is reading 'The Ring and the Book,' and I got into it. It's much easier than it sounds; I like it." And Kate read:

"Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee——"

"Were they—in love?" Cecy asked, arrested.

"It was to his wife!"

"Oh!" Cecy, going upon her way, with this morning's golden crop of fresh memories to enrich and make still more wonderful the old precious store of them, vaguely felt "wife" to be an alien word. She did not even now know herself to be in love. Something had taken possession of her, and, as with an actual possession, there seemed to be no recapturing the old way of feeling. She did not even remember it, much less attempt to recall it.

An overpowering desire for Dion's company, and the sound of his voice, and the look in his eyes, was always with her. Failing that, she wanted to be alone, to think about him, and smile dreamily to herself while she thought.

Her eyes blazed with a strange bright luster in these days, and her mouth was dry. Her heart beat irregularly, and she could eat nothing. Sometimes at home she sipped soup or coffee, or peeled herself an orange; for the rest she lived upon air. But when, ten days after their meeting, she had tea with Dion at the Palace Hotel, quite without her mother's knowledge, she was starving, and as she laughed and chattered, she consumed enough cinnamon toast and pastry for two meals.

"Listen, what's the idea? You say you didn't eat any breakfast or any lunch. Is your father holding out on you? Talk about two living as cheaply as one," protested Dion, lighting his cigarette, and bowing casually as he did so to some man friend who chanced to cross the court.

Just the finished manner in which he performed such small social details as this was fascinating to Cecilia. Apart from the fact that he was Dion, and so fundamentally and utterly different from everybody else in the whole world, it thrilled her to be constantly reminded that he was one of the Taylors, too. People were always bowing to him, in the streets, in the hotels; everybody knew him.

Dion lived in town, at his club. His family, a father and mother and an unmarried sister, were prominent in the Peninsula set, and lived in San Mateo, except for a few winter months, when the big city house in Jackson Street was opened.

He rode in the Park on summer mornings, and Peter bought his daughter a black horse, and Cecy rode, too. Mollie was not quite sure that this was correct, but she was almost as dazzled as Cecilia was by the strange element that Dion had brought into their lives, and as Cecilia quietly and definitely took the initiative in this, as in other problems, Mollie made no protest.

Mrs George Taylor, accompanied by her débutante daughter, Miss Marion, according to the society columns of the newspapers, left for Europe late in June, and the son of the family was consequently more

free than ever to humor his own desires. The Cunninghams went as usual to an unfashionable but highly comfortable and beautiful spot in the Lake Tahoe neighborhood, and Dion came up twice during the season, staying at the big hotel four miles away, and coming over to their luxurious camp in his car.

"Wouldn't it be a strange thing if he should really want to marry her, Papa?" Mollie said, cautiously, more than once.

"I don't know why he wouldn't!" Peter would answer, stoutly.

"She's such a little thing, Pete. And she'd be terrible rich, and mixin' in with all those stylish people! Could she do it?"

"I don't know why she couldn't!"

Not that Peter liked Dion, really. He had an instinctive distrust for all Dion's airy, superficial, pleasure-seeking crowd. He watched Dion almost truculently from under his thick, rough brows.

"I guess he means it," Peter decided, a little uneasily.

Aunt Allie stayed in the Howard Street house during the windy, cool, dirty city summer, always under promise to "get things straightened out so's she could come up to camp," and never going. She did not really like the pine cabins and the out-of-door meals at the Lake, and she enormously enjoyed the quiet rôle of martyr. "I keep house for my brother, his wife's away having a good time up at Tahoe," Miss Cunningham told her associates. She counted washes, sent loaded hampers up to Mollie, and at least once a week Kate or Maggie, or both, came in to dine with her.

Kate loved the big empty house and Annie Regan's jellied soup and icy raspberries. She loved the idle, aimless murmuring of her aunt and Miss Cunningham, the mournful review of cancers, funerals, miscarriages, and accidents that composed their talk.

"Jawn Kelly's goin' up to camp for his vacation, isn't he?" Maggie said to Allie one night, when Kate was on duty at the Library, and the two older women were alone.

"So Mollie said. But you can't always tell—with her."

"Why don't you give him a tip that Kate likes him? Kate's going up for her vacation, too."

"*Who* does?" Allie asked, at a complete loss.

"Kate. She likes him."

"Likes Jawn Kelly?"

"Well, she kind of does."

"For God's sake! I never knew *that* before! Well, live and learn," Allie said, astonished.

"Well, she kind of does."

"For God's sake! Kate? I never knew *that* before! Did you ever?" Allie mused, falling into a dream, as she fitted this stupendous fact to other facts. "Why don't you speak to Mollie yourself?" she presently asked.

"Well, you know how funny Mollie is. I did, once, and she got kind

of uppish, and says that Pete wouldn't want any tricks played on Jawn."

"Tricks!" Allie echoed. "But ain't that like Mollie?" she asked. "She'll do everything for her own, and nothing's too good for them, but let it be poor Robbie's girl——"

"Mollie'll get her come-uppance," Maggie prophesied, solemnly. "I don't think any too much of this young feller, Taylor, myself. Money ain't everything. There was a girl Ma used to tell us about, back in the old country——"

They reviewed this girl's mercenary marriage, and her terrible history, to the point where a child was born, "that the doctor said had gold in its blood," and that "died on her." Then Allie said:

"I don't hold much with these Taylors, and never did. They're a wild, divorcin', gamblin' lot, if you ask me. And why Mollie takes it all so pleasant, as if she was the poor child herself——"

"Mollie's very simple about it, she's as tickled as Cecy is, to think of gettin' in with that crowd," Maggie commented, simply. "She says that it's very much to the boy's credit that he'd look at an innocent little ger'rl like our Cecy, instead of one of them rich, stylish ladies that's for ever runnin' after the men!"

"If Kate gets Kelly, she'll get the better of the two!" was Miss Cunningham's final comment. And the conversation drifted to new fields.

Mollie, duly approached by her sister-in-law on the subject of Kate's vacation, proved oddly unresponsive; not that it made any difference in the end. For it proved that Kate was to have no vacation at all this year, because of a three weeks' absence in the winter when Maggie had tonsillitis and double pneumonia, and Kate quite philosophically contented herself with two long week-end visits to the camp in July. And Jawn Kelly did not get up to the Lake at all; Peter sent him to Los Angeles and Kansas City, and he took vacation in that form.

Unconfessed, even in her own soul, Mollie's real reason for rather diminishing than encouraging Kate's intimacy with her own group of boys and girls this year was instinctively maternal and protective. Kate and Dion Taylor had not met, as it chanced, nor did Mollie intend they should, too soon. Robbie's Catherine was a notably well-favored young creature, and, although there was less than a year's difference in age between her and Cecilia, Kate was infinitely the better poised, the surer of the two. She was a great flirt, and if she took it into her head to have her own fun with Cecy's most eligible young man, poor Cecy would be as helpless as a baby.

Mollie had no reason to suppose that Kate would act thus unworthily, but a hundred new fears and doubts and hopes were torturing her, as well as her daughter, and she was determined to take no chances. Dion Taylor might not, of course, be in earnest, but Mollie must act upon the supposition that he cared as deeply as poor Cecy did.

For John Kelly's visit she had really hoped, for John was supposedly an old admirer of Cecilia. To be sure the child had discouraged and

ignored him so consistently, during the year or two of religious vocation plans, that there had been small fresh evidence of any surviving devotion in John. Yet he would be a good foil; he would serve to show the all-conquering Dion that the field was not quite won.

Mollie was merry, motherly, careless with Dion. She laughed elaborately at any hint that her little girl was grown up enough to be considering marriage, or considered as a wife, seriously. She told Dion that there were a score of girls in the world he liked a lot better than any little girl within a hundred miles of here, and when Cecy, dewy and radiant, and in one of a constant succession of new summer frocks, went off in awed ecstasy to a dance at one of the hotels with Dion, Mollie would warn him: "Keep an eye on her, now. I won't have the boys makin' love to her yet awhile."

Yet the happy facts hammered all day and all night in Mollie's heart. A Taylor of San Mateo! Miss Marion Taylor's brother, if you please! Little Cecilia Cunningham Mrs George Dion Taylor! What a catch for the child, being carried off in her husband's low-slung car every week-end for all the famous delights of golf and fashionable dinners and country club lunches, down Burlingame way.

Mollie tried to pray about it, tried to analyze it soberly from the standpoint of the child's immortal soul, tried to say "God's holy will be done." But it was no use. She was as excited as Cecilia. When no letter, no Dion came, Mollie went about with a heart of lead; she could have cast herself upon the bed beside Cecy, and wept as bitterly.

Trembling with anxiety, she advised her daughter.

"Don't reproach him now, Cecy! He's his own master, dear. He hasn't spoke yet. It isn't as if you were engaged."

"But, Mama, it's just as good as! You know I told you that last week he wrote about my meeting his mother and all."

"Tell me again just what he said, lovey. Show me his note." And Mollie would study the scrawled lines, reading between them, analyzing this careless term and that. About once a day Cecilia said to her mother, impulsively:

"Mama, tell me! If it was some other girl entirely, and some other man, and you just were looking on, would you think he was in love with her?" And Mollie always answered earnestly:

"I'd know he was crazy about her!"

But she wished the summer was over, the engagement an actual fact. It was all but certain. But she wanted to be sure.

One September day, just before the Cunninghams came back to town, John Kelly walked into the Library, with a message for Kate.

"It seems your telephone's out of order," he said.

"Yes, since Tuesday. I'll have to report it," Kate answered, all roses. She knew that the lamentable failure of Uncle Harry to pay, with the six dollars and twenty-four cents entrusted to him, the two months' tele-

phone bill, and his misappropriation of the said money for purposes of his own, was at the root of the matter. But she couldn't tell John Kelly that.

"It seems that Mrs Cunningham is worrying because she hasn't heard anything from Tom for almost three weeks," John explained. "She had Mr Cunningham's cable last Saturday."

Kate looked thoughtful, went through a drawer of papers, and unearthed Tom's most recent postcards. She and John Kelly bent their heads over them, studying dates, and Kate wondered what he would do if she kissed his ear, where the fine crisp wave of black hair went over it.

She was beautiful this morning; there was no other word for it. Her eyes shone liquidly, her smooth cheeks glowed; there was a sort of dewy shine and sparkle about her. She pushed back the rich rings of her gold-tipped hair, to frown at the postcards, and John saw her white breast rise under the open sweep of her thin shirtwaist collar.

"Were you up at Lake Tahoe?"

"No, I'm just back from the East." Kansas City was "East" to these Californians.

"Did you get as far as New York?"

"Not this trip."

"There's a place I'd like to see," Kate said.

"Yes, I would too." The day was warm and sunny in the streets yet they could hear the reedy pipe of the fog whistles down beside the dreaming bay. "You were up at the Lake, Kate?"

How she loved to have him call her Kate! She determined to try "John" as soon as she dared.

"Last week-end. They were all looking fine, except poor Ellen, that gets poison-oak terribly," Kate reported. "She's a great heartscald to my aunt, that one," she added, innocently. "She's so bold. The Sisters are for ever reporting her!"

John was listening a little absently. As a matter of fact he was remembering that Leo Cudahy and an unspecified young lady, and the recently married Billy Prendergast, had talked about a picnic to Muir Woods next Sunday, and John had been urged to come, and bring a girl. He was wondering if handsome, friendly Kate Walsh would like to go.

But Kate thought: "He's thinking about Cecy and Dion Taylor," and her heart sank.

"Young Taylor didn't get up to Tahoe last week-end," she informed him, generously.

"That's an affair, is it?" John asked, unruffled, with a raised eyebrow.

He didn't care! At least he didn't look as if he did! Kate's heart went up with a spring.

"I'm a little surprised they'd let him get so friendly with any of them," John commented, dispassionately. "He doesn't seem like the kind of fellow that a religious girl would look at."

"Isn't he straight?" Kate asked, flatly.

"I don't know anything about him. Well, yes, except that I heard some men talking about him the other day, and it wasn't exactly—pleasant."

"I don't know why my aunt and uncle are so agreeable about it," Kate confessed. "For it mightn't be at all a happy marriage for Cecy, even if she got him. His people have lots of money, but——"

"Yes, but how did they get it?" John asked. "I don't know anything about this boy himself, but they said some pretty queer things about his father when he ran for Governor and was snowed under ten years ago, and everyone knows what the grandfather did. He was a common robber, and a blackmailer!"

He began to talk a healthy, youthful, American sort of socialism, equal chances for every child in the Union, and money going to the men whose sweat and labor and honesty earned it, and Kate was fascinated. John asked her if she'd like to go to a lecture on socialism some night, and she said she'd love it. And then he asked her if she would like to go to Muir Woods on Sunday, and Kate somehow held on to her senses and quietly said yes, that she would. John told her everyone was supposed to bring something for the lunch; but there was always twice too much, Kate needn't bother. He was going to bring sandwiches, because Mrs Foley, with whom he boarded, was "strong on them." And Mrs Prendergast was going to bring stuffed eggs and cold chicken. Kate suggested she bring a cake.

After he went away she sat smiling, motionless, for a long, long while. The automatic handling of a few books in no way disturbed her reveries; she neither saw nor heard what went on about her. When Miss Schultz came in at exactly three, Kate spoke to her about a possible absence on Sunday.

"Kate, for goodness sake, play hookey if you must," said her superior, nervously. "But don't tell me about it beforehand! If one of the Directors should walk in, at least let me be able to say that I don't know where you are! I declare it gets on my nerves!"

"But nobody comes in for books on Sunday afternoons these bright days," Kate reasoned.

"That don't make any difference—you're supposed to be here. Now do as you please," Miss Schultz begged, pathetically. "But don't tell me you're not going to be here, and don't tell me where you *are* going to be! You were gone two week-ends last month, and nothing happened, and I suppose you can risk one more."

"I love you!" Kate remarked, simply, kissing her.

"You poor girl you, that ought to have had your good two weeks' vacation," Greta Schultz remarked with sudden sympathy. "Why shouldn't you go off for the day if you want to! It isn't as if I couldn't handle ten times the people who ever come in here on Sunday!"

So Kate put on her hat, and went out into streets that seemed all friendly, sweet, and lovable today. She went to Hale's, and with the six dollars and twenty-four cents that had been again, painfully, collected

for the telephone bill, bought herself a dress of violet swiss with prim white organdie collar and cuffs. She stopped at the bakery, and at the butcher's, and reached home long after five o'clock, in a state of absolute felicity.

In such a mood, to be a working-woman, young and admired and healthy, was enough happiness for Kate. The familiar shabby corners, where chaff and papers were eddying languidly in the end of the warm, windy day, the familiar shabby side yard of the cottage, the smells of the kitchen, and her grandmother's spirited voice, all fitted into the picturesque and satisfying story whose heroine was named Kate.

"What'd you get, Kate?"

"Flounder. It was all he had left. He said Aunt Maggie hadn't been in."

"This is one of the days when you don't get 'round to anything," Maggie herself said, coming into the dingy kitchen, where the twilight was gathering in shadowy corners, filming the one small window.

"There ain't much flavor to flounders," old Mrs Walsh remarked, thoughtfully. "'Wet cardboard,' that's what your grandfather called 'em."

"I thought I'd make a chowder, Grandma," Kate suggested, gallantly.

"Oh, for the land's sakes, not a hot night like this!" Maggie protested. "Besides, Charley says chowder don't lay good on him. He thinks it's the onions——"

"Kalsominin'," muttered the old lady, bitterly, sitting at the battered table, with her chin cupped in her hand, and eyeing the ceiling resentfully. "They could kalsomine themselves out of shape, and that water them hook and laddher boys sloshed onto me roof would come through again! That little red one, he was the fresh young lad. What would he know of plasther, that one? 'Leave them kalsomine it, oncet,' he says to me, with the bright smile shining on the face of 'um."

Kate peeled, turned on the hissing water, snatched utensils, knelt to open the oven door, rattled a frying pan over the stove and scraped a match. Maggie sat dispiritedly at the table; she had been in the house all day, sewing fuzzy materials together, and she was depressed.

"I don't know where you get your energy, Kate," she said. "Did you pay the 'phome bill?"

"I did not," Kate answered, unashamed. "I bought myself a new dress. I'm going on a picnic, Sunday, with the Billy Prendergasts."

"Fevven's sake," Maggie commented, idly, reaching a torn scrap of crust toward the butter saucer, before chewing the scrap thoughtfully.

"Don't spoil your dinner, Aunt Mag."

"Spoil it, dear? I doubt if I taste any. The smell of that fish is enough!"

"I'll tell you what: let's just have crusts tonight. That's almost my favorite dinner!"

"You mean just hot crusts in hot milk? Your uncles say they won't eat that sort of stuff."

"Well, where are they? If they come home at all I'll probably have to do some ham and eggs for Uncle Charley anyway," Kate mused, philosophically. "Would you and Grandma like an omelette?"

"Seems like it's always Friday, and it's always eggs," was Maggie's only answer to this.

"Well, now I'll tell you what," Kate said, definitely, "Grandma and I will have milk toast and the doughnuts and the peaches and the rest of you can have what you like!"

"Until I get me teeth," Mrs Walsh was beginning disconsolately, when Kate interrupted brightly and suddenly: "John Kelly came in to the Library today. He says Aunt Mollie's nearly crazy because Tom hasn't written her for weeks, and Uncle Pete cabled last Saturday!"

"My God, they've got him!" Tom's grandmother predicted, darkly.

"Pete cabled? Fevven's sakes!" Maggie exclaimed.

"And John Kelly said," Kate rattled on, sitting on the floor before the little oven now, and watching her toast, "John Kelly said that he was surprised that Uncle Pete would encourage a fellow like Dion Taylor for a beau for Cecy. John hasn't been up to the Lake at all, because he's been East——"

"Poor Mollie, I'll bet she's fit to be tied!" Maggie mused.

"Lucky thim that has money for cables, and what good would it do whin it got there?" Mrs Walsh demanded, obscurely.

"Aunt Maggie, are you going to have some of this?"

"I'm so tired I don't seem to want anything, dear. Don't it seem very close to you tonight, Kate? I thought maybe I'd get out to the Jesuits, they've got a Mission on, but I don't know but what I'm too tired."

"There, Grandma!" Kate said, triumphantly placing before the old lady a steaming soup plate. "Doesn't that look good? And there are doughnuts in that bag, and peaches in the other. I never saw such big peaches. Two bits a dozen!"

"Kate, did you make any more toast than you wanted?" Maggie demanded, as she always demanded at this point. "That smells so good. Is the kettle boiling?"

"No, but wait a minute!" The girl bestirred herself enthusiastically, and presently Maggie was brooding over strong tea, and dipping toast in it thankfully, and Kate had her own bowl of bread and milk.

"Light the light, Mag, the way I won't put the clothes-pins off the winder sill into me mouth," said the old lady.

"Oh, Grandma, it seems to make it so much hotter when the light is lit!" the girl pleaded, "and it brings bugs in!"

"Old lady Lennon was anointed today," Maggie stated, suddenly. "I can't think how I didn't come to tell you! Cassy was in, and she says Milton won't get here until tomorrow night. His wife's expectin', too, poor thing. She says they'll sell the house if the old lady goes. But Myra Dunn was tellin' Cassy—just pour what's in the pot, dear, I like it strong—Myra told Cassy that this is three times they've all come down,

and the old lady's fooled them. I declare, Kate, if toast and tea don't taste good tonight. Thank God we don't have many hot nights like this!"

"Aunt Mag," Kate asked, luxuriating in the last of the salty, buttery, cooling milk, "suppose we were all at the Palace, and you could have anything you liked, what would you have?"

"Well, I'd go to the Fairmont, a hot night like this, and there's Paddy's fowl for you!" Maggie answered, interestedly. "They asked Pat what kind of a fowl he'd have, and says he, 'I'd not have a fowl at all, but why wouldn't I have it a little cow itself, while I'd be about it!' I'd have on a black lace dress and a hat with them dull pink roses," Maggie resumed, gratified by her mother's deep laughter, "and I'd eat—well, I don't know that I could do better than your toast and tea, Kate."

"Mollie's husband takes her everywhere for dinner, and acrost the ocean, and doesn't he treat her like she was made of glass itself?" Kate's grandmother remarked, assertively.

"I'd have cold chicken, tomato salad, iced tea——" Kate was beginning, animatedly.

"Oh, I'd have iced tea!" Maggie interrupted, tearing apart her first spongy doughnut.

"Iced tea and cut-up peaches," Kate dreamed on. "I'll go out to church with you, Aunt Maggie," she added, pulling the wet crumpled skin from the luscious fruit. "I'd love it. Let's pile these things——"

"Put the kettle on, girls, and I'll do the whole of them," said the old lady. "The boys must be eatin' downtown."

"Have we butter and eggs, Grandma? I've got to make a cake in the morning; it's my night at the Library tomorrow. Have we any chocolate? Oh, hello——"

Kate's voice fell somewhat flatly on the last word, for both Charley and Harry had come in from the yard door. Harry looked dazed and weary, Charley was as always magnificent.

"Hello, Ma; hello, girls. Now, Ma, don't be frightened, but Harry don't feel very good. He thinks it's something he et. Now, don't be frightened—he's all *right,"* Charley pursued. "Sit there, old boy," he said, concernedly, to his brother. "And, Kate, you get him something hot to drink. Is there any soup?"

"There's a bowl of gravy. But it's Friday," objected Kate, entirely out of sympathy, and unalarmed.

"Now, never you mind about Friday! This may be a case of life and death. You heat some up. Or, here, how about some good hot tea?"

"The fire's out," Kate said, ungraciously, removing the last traces of their late meal.

"Maggie, you get a handful of wood out there," Charley directed. "Now, mind you, the boy's all right, but I want to watch him until he looks a good deal better than he does at present writing."

"Lishen, Ma," Harry now said for himself, heavily, keeping his sodden eyes fixed on his mother. "Here's how it was, Ma. Leo Baker—you seen

here one Sunday—Leo wanted to st-hay downtown, an' I says, 'No,' I says, 'my mother was expectin' me——' "

Harry's voice dropped at this point, and he subsided into a sort of slumber.

"Should we get him to bed?" Maggie, who had abandoned any plan of her own for the evening, asked her older brother anxiously. "What did he drink, Charley?" she asked in a whisper.

"Some awful stuff Baker had. He says he only tasted it; he says it was canned oysters," Charley answered. "Come on, old boy, we're going to get you to bed, that's where you belong!" he added, loudly, tugging at his brother's inert figure.

"Should we have the doctor, Charley?" Maggie demanded, half lifting and half carrying such proportion of her brother's weight as Charley could not handle.

"I don't think so. Fix me some bacon and eggs, will you, Kate?" Charley said, importantly, over his shoulder. "They sent for me, and I had to search pret' near all over town for Harry—run him to earth in Carter's."

Well, it was no unusual scene. But Kate never grew accustomed to it, and her fine mouth formed itself into lines of bitter distaste as she set about preparing the meal. Fish made her uncles ill, the family understood. They must have meat.

Charley came out, in five minutes, to eat with a martyred air, and intersperse his large mouthfuls with condescending comment: "Plenty! Plenty! It's fine. I only wanted a bite. I don't care what I eat—don't apologize, Maggie."

"I would have fried you up some potatoes, if I hadn't thought you were eatin' downtown, Charley," Maggie assured him, sitting near him at the table, with her needle-bitten fingers locked, and her eyes enjoying his pleasure in his food.

"You talk fine now, Maggie," suddenly and resentfully burst out her mother, who had been hunched into a chair, following these proceedings with her sharp old beady eyes, "but it's you and Mollie done it, drivin' my boys out of their own home wit' your beaus and your uppishness! Whin did you ever make the place a home for them, or make them stay in o' nights, and not be stravagin' the streets like wild wolves! Whin it was Pete Cunningham and Frank Cahill callin' you two could make yourselves very grand, and it was 'Won't you step inside?' and 'Ma, where's the cards that we can have a little game of "Five Hundred?" ' but never a stip you'd stir to keep them away from them cursed saloonkeepers that drugs the little fellers on their way home from school itself, that they'd get a taste for it——"

Kate slipped away from the familiar accusation and the high, complaining voices. She went about the house, and sat on the front steps, and stared blankly ahead of her.

The autumn night was unprecedented in warmth, and the stars seemed

very near, throbbing, throbbing, throbbing, as if the whole spread of the pale gray sky were pulsing together. Kate smelled pungent nasturtiums, and her grandmother's famous geraniums, the frilled and fluted "Lady Washin'tons" from which slips had been going all over the city for forty years. Forms went by the old fence, in the half light, girls' voices laughed, men answered huskily. Suddenly a wave of honeysuckle scent came like a tangible thing down the dirty, shabby street.

Kate heard the doctor's telephone tingle next door, and the good old doctor, sitting on the steps with his wife and their orphaned granddaughter, went stiffly inside, and Kate could hear him saying: "T-t-t! I'll come right over. Maybe we can help that a little before she tries to get to sleep."

A few minutes later the sound of his cranked car came from the back of the cottage. Kate heard the little granddaughter protest about going to bed: "It's so *hot,* Grandma!"

"Folks sit out on their steps like this all summer long, in the East!" the old lady called to Kate.

"The idea!" Kate called back, tears trembling in her voice. She hugged her knees, stared straight above her. It was sweet out here in the dark. She thought of John Kelly; he seemed clean, clear-cut, someone infinitely big and gentle and good to rest against. Oh, to get away from the stupidity, and the fighting, and the dishes. But Kate was too tired to hope, or to pray, tonight. She merely dreamed idly. Would a good man ever marry her? Would she ever get out of this little cottage, where all her remembered years had been spent? Did girls as poor as she was ever have—well, not always enough, but *sometimes* enough, money?

After a while Charley passed her without seeing her, his hat cocked rakishly on the side of his head, his cigarette a pin-point of light in the dark. A neighbor and chum joined him by chance at the gate.

"This whole row of houses will have to come down some time soon, Walsh!"

"I suppose so," Kate heard her uncle say, thoughtfully, as the two men turned toward brightly lighted Fillmore Street. "Man made me a fairly good offer for it the other day! But I don't know that I'll sell!"

Their voices died away. Kate, after a while, got to her feet, feeling dirty and weary and tumbled, and went blinking in again to the closeness, the bright hot lights, and the greasy smells of the kitchen.

Her grandmother was washing dishes with a rag, Maggie wiping. A sulphurous silence prevailed. Now and then the old woman made a quite audible snuffing sound. Maggie was red-eyed, as always after one of these scenes.

Kate began to put away plates. All three women sulked together. Mrs Walsh tipped up her dinted, iron-gray dishpan, and the gray water flooded the sink and floated strainers and pans.

"Well, you're very agreeable company, the two of ye!" said the old woman, bitterly, stirring the drain with a long iron spoon.

Maggie, unsolicited, brought the kettle from the stove, and poured a stream of fresh hot water into the pan her mother was filling at the cooling tap. Refilling the kettle, it became evident that Maggie had burned her wrist with a stream of hot steam.

She writhed. Her eyes filled. She wrapped the hurt wrist in a dirty damp tea-towel, and lowered her head, bending her neck sideways with pain.

"Oh, Maggie, you burned yourself!" Kate exclaimed, clutching her.

"You're scaltet!" the old woman added, shrilly.

"It's all right—it's nothing!" Maggie faltered. She essayed to struggle on with the dish-wiping, fumbled at plates with a muffled and shapeless hand. Suddenly she raised the forlorn bandage to her eyes, and began to cry, awkwardly and unwillingly.

"It's just—everything!" she sobbed, brokenly subsiding upon a cluttered chair, letting the bandage fall, and resting her head upon her scarlet wrist. "God knows I know I'm a failure, there's nobody in this world would regret it if I was taken tomorrow——" She faltered to silence.

"That ain't you talkin', that's the pain talkin'," old Mrs Walsh said, sharply, after a pause, as she applied a compress of wet soda about the burn. "Holt that there, dear——"

"Oh, Ma, that feels good," Maggie diverged to say gratefully.

"Well! Then holt your horses about nobody regrettin' you," the old woman said. She and Kate, who had been looking on with scared and sympathetic eyes, now resumed their cleaning with double speed.

"Wait and I'll help you," Maggie said, shortly, after an interval of silence.

"Oh, nonsense!" Kate answered, impatiently.

The smells of yellow soap and ashes and grease and coffee blended into a warm clean smell of scoured wood. Mrs Walsh, securing an old limp black bag in which what she called "me work" was always kept, began to knit upon purple and black stringy wool. She took her rocker, lifting her small shriveled feet, in spread and shapeless old shoes, out of Kate's way, when the girl, still somber-eyed and silent, pushed the worn old broom about.

Kate stooped to gather crumbs, rose red-faced from the floor, opened a stove plate and emptied her dust-pan within. She drew the window shade, closed the closet door, jerked a chair or two into place, making work for herself with a sort of bitter pleasure in its meanness.

When it came to her refilling the sugar bowl for breakfast, her grandmother, apparently oblivious of what was going on, and knitting fast and furiously, like some old crone weaving destinies, remarked suddenly:

"That Allie Cunningham's a fine one! What does she do but sit at home and 'phome that they'd send up more butter or meat or whatever."

Both Kate and Maggie ignored this, recognizing in it a distinct overture. Exactly what she resented neither perhaps quite knew, but sulking was one of Maggie's natural refuges, and there was something oddly

soothing to Kate in the maintenance of an absolute silence. She swit about severely; the kitchen had not been so ordered for some mo

"*She'd* not be one to do her brother a good turn!" Mrs Walsh sued, unencouraged. Her favorite device was to select Allie for a when she wanted in an indirect fashion to praise Maggie. "There lives like an ould cockroach in a tavern kitchen—savin' your prese she added.

"Maggie, is it better?" Kate asked, in a low tone. In moment stress she sometimes quite simply called her aunt Maggie.

"It's all right," Maggie answered. It was now her turn for an ture, and she said mildly.

"No, it's me. I'm a bad sister to the boys. I know it!"

Kate, tired to the aching point, sat down, pulled open the table dra and indifferently began a game of solitaire.

"Aunt Mollie agrees with Grandma," she said, simply, "that we the boys terribly."

She put up an ace. Maggie, still nursing her wrist, watched her a melancholy sort of interest.

"Mollie Walsh does?" asked old Mrs Walsh, knitting furiously.

"What did you say, Grandma?" Kate asked, raising heavy, beau blue eyes dutifully.

"She'd treat 'em better, I suppose?" the old woman demanded, a silence. "Well, that beats Banager! Mollie——"

Silence. Kate shifted the cards, Maggie sniffled sharply with th of a wet nose, breathed more easily, clung to her wrist.

"I wish Mollie's boys in the day of need may have a sister like Ma and that's the whole of that for ye!" Mrs Walsh presently burst f seething. She muttered: "Treat them terribly, is it? Little does M know of the ups and downs of it, as the feller says when dinymite him up over the pond, and down he come amongst the ducks—the creatures!"

Kate allowed herself a dimple, played steadily on.

"What more cud a saint itself do for them than Maggie does? manded her grandmother presently.

"I don't know, Grandma," Kate answered, mildly, and was still.

Mrs Walsh, who was weaving for herself one of the dreary, w tabbed caps she wore all winter long, flung out her yarn with a s claw.

"Never mind, Maggie," the old woman said, with a sort of trium and trembling prophecy, "your gardeen angel's got it down, it's all against the Day of Judgment, the way you've been an angel to your brothers."

"Not much angel about me!" Maggie said, awkwardly, with some between a laugh and a sob.

"I wish I was half as good!" Kate assured her, affectionately, st ing out a hand to lay it over her aunt's.

"Oh, no," Maggie said, briefly, smiling, blinking, gulping.

"It'll all come back to you, ger'rls," Mrs Walsh assured them, solemnly, with a series of short, convulsed nods. "The day'll come when you'll thank God on your knees you never failed the poor boys or me!"

"I do thank God for it, every day of my life!" Maggie said, passionately. "I wouldn't change with the Queen!"

Kate laid her bright head upon the table, and laughed until the thick lashes about her blue eyes were sopping with tears. But when she suddenly straightened up and continued her game, she would give no explanation of her laughter.

Her grandmother, after one sharp discontented look, went on knitting, Maggie sighed resignedly, and Kate played the black on red, and the red on black. Occasionally she or Maggie spoke admiringly of the order of the kitchen.

Peace, after the storm, was doubly sweet. The kettle sang clearly, a little thread of sound as wavering and evanescent as was its drifting plume of steam. The clock ticked, and Kate murmured to Maggie as she shuffled the soggy old cards.

"No, Maggie," said old Mrs Walsh, mildly, "God never sent a better daughter to the wor'rld than you are, dear!"

"Should I take Harry in some strong tea, Ma?" Maggie suggested, consoled, rewarded, for everything.

"Leave him lay, it'll do him no hurt to go hungry the onst!" the old woman answered, hardily.

Silence, except for the kettle and the clock. The cooling night air pulsed dreamily with content. Kate told herself in her secret heart that if her game came out she would be married this year. Maggie studied the red burn on her hand.

"If Mollie had less to say about Maggie, she might have time to learn Cecilia that she'd make half the woman you are, Kate!" her grandmother said, suddenly.

"Well, that's what I say," Maggie added, loyally. "I declare for goodness and unselfishness I never seen the like of our Kate in a young creature before! Vocation or no vocation, or marryin' a rich man, she that's always had everything, you wouldn't get it out of Cecy Cunningham!"

So Kate was rewarded, too.

CHAPTER VII

The next morning Kate rose in sweet foggy coolness, and baked her cake, and stood it upside down on its own pan, to wait all day for frosting that night. Maggie, who never could resist her sweet tooth, trimmed off various segments for sampling, during the day, but the generous coating of chocolate disguised all this, and Kate was accustomed to

Maggie's little weakness. Maggie never served a pie that had not a slim wedge missing, or put the Thanksgiving turkey itself on the table without laughingly apologizing for at least one luscious sliver gone from the breast. Indeed, the lean, nervous woman made most of her meals in this haphazard fashion.

And in the dreamy beauty of the Sunday morning Kate, with the cake in a neat box, was at the ferry, looking, with several hundred other Sunday picknickers, for her party.

Even at ten o'clock, the muffling, warm fog was still heavy. But the day was to be perfect none the less, and it was only as a concession to Aunt Maggie and Grandma that the girl wore her brown coat, a coat that had been Cecilia's two years before. Cars were lined in long waiting tails across the ferry place, policemen were ranking them, and the trolleys that hummed down Market Street kept up a steady clang, clang, clanging of bells.

Children in straw hats, stolid babies in lacy bonnets, boxes and boxes and boxes of lunch, the place swarmed with them. Sunday newspapers shed green and pink segments upon the asphalt, and little boys snatched at them. Gulls screamed over the long building, and the departing ferryboats sent mellow warnings across the gently moving waters.

John Kelly was waiting, his car parked well forward in the line. His face brightened as he saw Kate. He looked handsome, and groomed, and friendly, as he took her box, and guided her toward the car. Kate took the seat beside him.

"Oh, John, I forgot to tell you! Leo Cudahy came into the Library last night, and Maysie's sick—she had ptomaine, they think. They can't come."

"Oh, too bad. It'll be just us and the Prendergasts then. But no matter!" John said, shifting gears and starting his engine. "I guess they're on board, we've not got any too much time."

Ecstasy. Ecstasy. It was one of her golden hours. They left the boxes in the car, and put their coats over them, and roamed about the big ferryboat looking for the Prendergasts. The sun came out, and shone upon all the happy holiday-makers, and the clean stretches of deck, and the wings of gulls, and the softly rippling blue bay.

Other girls had other men, and were flirting and talking, and bustling about quite happily with them. And Kate had John, John Kelly at last, all to herself, and her heart was full.

No Prendergasts appeared. "Maybe they took the earlier boat, and they're in Sausalito," John suggested.

"Maybe their car broke down." Kate's spirits experienced a breakdown of their own as she mentioned it. Was anything going to spoil their happy, happy day?

"Oh, well, they'll find us," John said, contentedly, abandoning the hunt. But Kate was worried.

Muir Woods was a twelve-mile drive from the ferry on the other

side, only twelve miles, but it consumed a long hour, for the roads were mountainous and narrow. Then she and John would be in the heart of the big woods; there was a forest inn there, but they would carry their lunch down to the stream. Two hours more, all alone, she and John Kelly, unchaperoned; and then the long trip home alone, she and John Kelly still unchaperoned.

No use asking herself what her grandmother and aunts would think. She knew only too well what they would think. Kate's heart beat fast. But need they know it if she and John had their picnic, and returned home at the expected time?

Yes, and suppose there was a flat tire, or John was arrested for speeding by one of the hawk-eyed Sunday speed cops? What a horribly compromising position for her to find herself in!

"Well, Kate, it looks like you and me," John observed, as they took their places again in the car. "I don't know why Billy didn't let me know, but maybe her mother came down last night. They were sort of half expecting the old lady."

He was utterly unconscious of conventional complications, as they moved along in the stream of cars, and floated free in the emptiness of the country road. Kate was praying. Here was her chance, the long sweet autumn day of confidences and opportunities, the chance for which she had been hoping for months—for a long year. And must she spoil it by returning tamely to the dusty Sunday city, and the winds, and perhaps even the Library?

It was too much to ask of flesh and blood. She remained silent at his side, and they moved along through a perfumed world of gardens and woods, shining flat marshes, and the purple rises of the solemn mountains. It was just noon when the car swept under the tall plumed shafts of the giant redwoods, and in the green-tempered light that was like that of some old cathedral they reached their journey's end.

In vain the girl tried to fling herself whole-heartedly into the adventure, now that she was committed to it. A sense of guilt, of uneasiness, haunted her. The Sunday papers were always printing horrible stories about girls who did things like this. Grandma would "skin" her, if ever she found it out! And apart from the danger of detection it wasn't really and seriously a nice thing to do. Suppose one were suddenly taken ill —broke a leg?

She went into the big, widely porched log cabin in the forest, to straighten her hat and powder her nose, and found herself furtively eyeing the other women and children who were circling about there. Not a familiar face. And now they'd have lunch, she reflected, and in a few hours be home again, and that would be the end of it!

But when she rejoined John, a woman and a young girl were with him, and Kate knew, with a peculiar little chill in her heart, that all was lost. Mrs Tenny and Miss Winifred Tenny were introduced; the two men of their party almost immediately came up, and with more than

one significant glance at her husband, it was arranged by Mrs Tenny that since Miss Walsh's friends had disappointed them, she and Mr Kelly had better join the Tenny party. John, to Kate's hot-cheeked annoyance, seemed to feel this an excellent arrangement.

The women were extremely gracious to John, but there was no instant in the hours that followed in which they did not make Kate feel that a young girl who would go off alone with a man for a whole day was a peculiarly unconventional young girl. Perhaps her glowing beauty, in the violet swiss, with the crisp, picturesque collar and cuffs, was no argument in her behalf, and perhaps her instant subjugation of Winny's young man, Earl Saunders, further pointed the little barbs that Winny and Winny's mother constantly let fly in her direction. The other man, Winny's father, was a stout placid person, who concealed himself behind an opened newspaper and fell soundly asleep.

Kate could not sit silent, like a naughty child. So when Winny and both the young men, under her mother's direction, were laying soft big mulberry leaves in a pattern on the long, bare picnic table, Kate began to help the older woman with the inviting lunch-box.

"We thought these friends, the Prendergasts, might be on the Sausalito side," she said, as if casually. "They—they were just married in June."

"I don't know them," Mrs Tenny answered, uninterestedly. "No, don't bother, Miss Walsh," she added, definitely. "I know just where everything is, and I can do it quicker myself!"

Kate, scarlet, subsided. It was at luncheon that young Saunders appeared to have his first fair look at her, and after that she employed herself by showing Winny, who was a noisy, plain, animated little creature, how easily a younger and handsomer woman could captivate a man. Before them all, Earl Saunders asked if he could come and see her some night, and remarked delightedly that Miss Walsh was—well, he thought she was the smartest girl he'd ever met!

"Here, here, right before Winny!" Mrs Tenny reminded him playfully but sharply.

"Oh, well, you know what I mean!" said young Saunders, unashamed. Later, John took an opportunity in an aside to ask Kate if she "minded" their having joined the Tenny party.

"She sort of suggested it," John explained, unhappily. "She seemed to kind of take it for granted that we would. 'I don't know Miss Walsh,' she said. 'But if, as you say, your chaperon disappointed you, and she is your employer's niece, it seems to me it would be much wiser for you to place her in my care!' Was that all right, Kate?" John ended anxiously.

"Perfectly," Kate said, icily, hating him.

"No, but would you have done it if you'd been there?"

"Of course," she answered, in a dead voice. "Miss Tenny's calling you, John," she added, looking beyond him.

"Anyway, you seem to like that young Saunders," John said, lingering. Kate said "stupid" firmly and slowly, in her own mind, some five or six times, but made no audible reply. "They wouldn't have asked us if they hadn't wanted us. I think we kind of added to their party," he finished, doubtfully.

"I don't want to interfere," Winny Tenny exclaimed, gaily, coming to the stream where Kate was washing the dainty little white enamel cups from the lunch-box, "but Papa wants Mr Kelly to look at his engine; he thinks it's missing! This way, Mr Kelly."

Kate, when he was again in her neighborhood, asked John if they could make an early start for home. "I ought to be at the Library before five," she said, dutifully. John—it was the single bright spot in the whole miserable experience—seemed glad to act on the suggestion.

But now the infatuated Saunders supplied an unexpected complication. He said he really *ought* to get back to town. His father was down at the office that afternoon, and he had promised to come in.

"Fruit shipping, this season," he apologized. And John, with an interested look, shook his head. "We don't touch it at all, in Cunningham & Co.," he said. "Enough risk without that!"

"Who's the 'Co.'?" Winny demanded, coquettishly. "Are you?"

"Well, part of it," John admitted. And Kate felt a new, sick thrill of pride in this man whose interest no effort of hers seemed to win. "Come with us then, Mr Saunders," John added, hospitably. "That is, if that's all right for you," he added, to the Tennys.

"Perfectly all right!" Mrs Tenny agreed, sweetly. "Business is business." And little as she wanted this third person on the home trip, Kate could have laughed from the depth of her sore heart to see the tables turned so neatly upon Winny.

After lunch, shaking off crumbs, brushing up for the little journey, she heard Winny murmuring to her mother.

"Well, *I* would! Men don't know anything about such things. I don't think she's much or she wouldn't have done it. She's no more engaged to him than I am—I got it out of him without his knowing it. He just knows her uncle——"

"Maybe I'll give him a hint. You hate to have a girl like that think she can get away with murder," Mrs Tenny said, thoughtfully. "I guess he's doing awfully well. You ought to ask him to your party, Winny."

"Oh, I'm going to!" Kate heard Winny answer fervently.

Kate sat on, her face blazing, her heart choking her. Mother and daughter were just on the other side of the big tree against which Kate was leaning. When Kate got to her feet, and walked about the tree, she could well interpret the look that crossed both their faces.

She made her farewells with dignity, and climbed into her seat beside John. Young Saunders took the other seat just behind them; his hot, joyous breath was upon their necks all the way home.

Yet it was a hilarious trip, and Kate thought John seemed happier—

buying them magazines and peppermints on the boat, and discussing the fruit business as compared to the grocery business with Earl—than he had been all day. For herself, she only wanted the utter failure of it over, forgotten, blotted out by days, weeks, months in which she could think less and less about it.

She was in the Library at ten minutes of five, enormously gratifying and relieving the faithful Miss Schultz. Kate said good-by to Earl and John together; she resumed her silesia apron, her green eye-shade, her pencil and her paper cuffs in a cold mood of anger and hatred, against them, the world, everything. She hoped, stamping and scribbling viciously, that she would never see either of them again.

And then, late at night, looking at her flushed and weary self in her bureau mirror, noting the becoming width of the plain dark blue hat, and the way the pressed tendrils of her hair clung about her temples, and the violet color that her swiss gown gave her eyes, Kate felt confidence, and even an innocent sort of surprise, return to her soul, soothing and resting it after so much pain.

She was certainly beautiful. What was John Kelly made of, he that was so smart and so kind, so interested, so witty in his quiet way, that he could look at her, and not see it?

CHAPTER VIII

"KATE, there's someone here wants to see you. Mama says you're to come over to dinner!"

It was Cecy telephoning, at five o'clock on a dark evening in early November. Her voice sounded excited, happy.

"You're engaged!" guessed Kate, with an older girl's faint instinctive pang at the suspicion.

"Oh, Kate, aren't you terrible! Somebody'll hear you. No, I'm not, or at least, it isn't that——"

"You *would* give yourself away!" Kate jeered.

"Well, I didn't mean—that is—aren't you awful, Kate?" But Cecy was thoroughly relishing her own confusion and its cause. "No, but the thing is, listen, Kate—can you come over to dinner? We've got company that wants to meet you!"

"John Kelly," Kate's heart said. Aloud she added, "Well, I'll look at my list of engagements. We're having a very formal affair here, to begin with. Covers are now laid for five, on the kitchen table, and two pounds of the best frankfurters are already cooking. The dainty flower scheme is in lavender and pink——"

"Kate, Mama says will you come?"

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Wait'll I brush my hair!" The first appearance of the voilet swiss may have been a complete and utter failure, but its subsequent wearing had made it that delightful possession of

the early twenties, the dress in which Kate said she "always had a good time."

She tumbled down the glorious ripples of her chestnut and gold hair, scrambled them up again, jumped into the swiss, drew her beautiful brows into a frown as she pinned the cuffs with trim little "beauty pins", mashed her new hat, a round-brimmed blue beaver, down over her violet eyes, and caught up her, or rather Cory's, old coat.

"Have you carfare?" Uncle Charley asked her, punctiliously, from the kitchen table where he was solemnly spearing sausages, and gravely slapping half its bulk in mustard on each bite.

"Loads!" Kate sang, kissing the pink bare parting of her grandmother's head, and wondering with a little deep amusement if the benefactor Charley had as much or any carfare at all, as she made her escape.

The Cunningham house, when she reached it, rang with joy and excitement. Mollie's "company" tonight was none other than Tom! Tom grown thinner, and oddly older, and using a French word every other minute, and with a mustache!

With a wild scream Kate rushed into his arms, and Tom hugged her and kissed her, and she hugged and kissed him back with good measure. And then they all sat about the sitting-room fire, in the dear old fashion of the days before Tom went away—how long was it ago? A year and a half, gracious goodness!—and laughed and talked and clasped hands and kissed each other again like the mad folk they were.

"Well—but I don't know where to begin! And you're all talked out!" Kate exulted. "But tell me—isn't he handsome, and isn't he French? Tom, I'm in love with you!"

"So as far as you like, *chérie*," said Tom. Peter, lying back in his chair laughed and wiped his glasses, and Mollie, sitting close to her boy on the sofa, laughed ecstatically, and Ellen and Mart and Cory and Paul, all squeezed as closely as they could get to Tom, shouted too. And Aunt Allie, trying not to show how idiotically and completely happy she was, asked interestedly: "What's that word mean, now?"

"No, but tell me—here's what I was going to ask when I thought how good-looking you'd get, Tom," Kate recovered, after the interval—"tell me when did you get here?"

"At half-past four. My train was two hours late," Mollie said, tears of joy in her fond, proud eyes. "I was stooping over to pick Paul's socks off my rug, and someone came in and grabbed me from behind. I thought it was Mart! Oh, my God, the yell I let out!"

"She yelled bloody murder," Allie commented, proudly.

"But, Tom—with no warning or letter or anything!" Kate marveled. "And what brought you?"

"Oh, I thought the old man had had his own way long enough in the place," Tom answered, with an imprudent smile for his father. "Time there's some new blood in there. Paris is—keen. But—well, I'd had enough. America looks pretty good to me. No place like home!"

"That's what he says," Mollie and Allie, Cecy and Ellen all chorused eagerly together, for Kate's benefit. "He says that he could have kissed the Liberty Statue, coming up the ocean into New York; he said that he sat out on the back platform all the way from Colfax on; he said when he saw pepper trees and eucalyptus he almost died!"

"Tell what the funny nigger said on the train!" Paul demanded.

But Tom didn't repeat that. Too many other things to talk about. Every separate member of the family had to record his or her experiences in welcoming Tom, the surprise, the emotion, the delight.

"Kate, you're handsomer than ever. My Lord, you're glorious!" Tom told her.

"Tom, don't forget for an instant that you and I aren't within the forbidden degrees of kindred!" Kate answered, joyously. And Mollie shot Peter a triumphant look, and caught his significant and satisfied glance in return. All was as it should be: the boy had had his fling and now he would enter the firm, and he and Robbie's beautiful girl would duly make a match of it.

So it was a happy evening for Peter and Mollie. Now that it was too late, now that Tom and Kate were unable ever to be more to each other than affectionate and mutually admiring cousins, for all the years to come, the managing parents were congratulating themselves heartily upon what might once, but for their scheming, have come about naturally and happily for them all.

Tom had to hear about Cecy's beau, in Los Angeles just this week, but to be home for Thanksgiving, when Tom would surely meet him.

"And Kate must meet him, too," Mollie said, expanding in the warmth of this heavenly hour.

"What!" exclaimed Tom, in surprise, "hasn't Kate met him?"

Well, no, Mollie and Cecilia hastened to explain, a little lamely. You see, everyone was up at Tahoe, and then Dion went East to meet his mother and sister, and was gone four weeks, and then—well—well, anyway, Kate should surely meet him now, and Tom, too.

"Maybe we'll have two weddings—a double wedding—next year," Mollie thought, with a throb of pride. But no, it couldn't be a double wedding, because Kate and Tom would surely have a Mass, and poor Cecy was marrying a "Produstant." Vague future complications of "the promises" Dion must make regarding children, and the details of the actual ceremony came into Mollie's mind, and she sighed. Dion had shown a tendency toward actual atheism, Cecy was arguing with him about it, little saint that she was. Mollie was fearful, but she did not realize that she was chiefly fearful that Cecy's religion would cost her her admirer; she honestly thought her apprehensions came under the head of piety, and she was mournfully proud of them.

"Nothing settled, Tom," Peter assured his eldest son. "Young Taylor likes Cecy—that's all we know now. There was weeks here that he never came near her!"

"But, Papa, that was because he had to meet his mother!" Cecy, although she always denied serious intentions on Dion's part, never was content to hear any one else deny them.

"Cecy!" her brother mused; "that was going to be a nun!"

"No, I wasn't," and "No, she wasn't," said Cecy and her mother together, and Mollie went on: "That was just a young girl's idea. Papa never believed she had a vocation, and it turned out Papa was right!"

"Kate, who's in love with you now?" Tom presently asked, in an aside. Kate flushed brightly and laughed as her only reply.

"But who's *he* in love with?" Kate, who read him clearer than any of the others, asked herself shrewdly.

"Do you see anything of John Kelly?" Tom asked her, when the unbelievably happy evening was over, and when, under strict promise just to kiss Aunt Mag and Grandmother, and return, his mother had permitted him to see Kate home.

"Not much."

"He's an awfully nice fellow, you know. I wish to the Lord it was he that was after Cecy," Tom added, "instead of this other! Taylor isn't the kind of son-in-law Mama'd be so crazy about."

"I—heard something about him," Kate said, ashamed of herself because it was not all sorrow that she felt in hearing Cecy's prospects belittled.

"And how about you, Kate? Heart whole?"

"Oh, not in the least!" But she laughed as she said it. She and Tom were on the dark outside seats of the trolley now, and she could lean against his big arm, cousin fashion, as she asked directly: "Who is she, Tommy? Tell Kate!"

She saw his eyes flash in the half dark; his arm tightened about her.

"Who put *you* wise?" he asked, grinning.

"You did—all evening!"

"My God, do you suppose they're all on!" Tom exclaimed.

"Not one of them. All too happy to get you back. Tell me, Tom. Is she nice?"

"She's—but you'll meet her," Tom said, after a pause. "Yes, she's—nice."

"A San Franciscan? Or is she French, Tom?"

"Listen here, you know you're not to gab about this!" Tom diverged to warn her.

"Cross my heart and hope to die!" Kate said, hastily.

"Yes, she's beautiful——" Tom admitted, slowly, then.

"And are you engaged?"

"Oh, my God, no! She doesn't even know I like her!"

Kate was disappointed. The affair seemed vague.

"But you're going to tell her, Tom? You really are in love?"

The boy was silent for a space. Then he said, in a hard, thoughtful voice:

"I suppose so."

"You'll tell *me* her name?" Kate begged.

"Her name's Babette," Tom answered, unhesitatingly. "Babette Newman."

"Newman? The Alameda Newmans?"

"No." There was a slight hesitation, and then Tom added, "That's her married name. Her family's name is Garberg."

"A widow? And she was a Garberg?" Kate repeated it in a puzzled voice, repeated it again sharply. "Tom," she began, quickly, and stopped. "She isn't——" Kate said again, impulsively, and again was silent.

They had left the car now, and were walking the short distance to the house. Tom arrested her, in the dark, with fingers laid on her arm, and Kate, breathing fast, and frightened, turned to face him.

"Promise me you'll keep your mouth shut, Kate? Swear it."

"Oh, Tommy, of course!" Kate whispered.

"Well, I'll tell you then, although there's nothing to tell. I met her in Paris, studying singing, about four months ago. She had a tiny apartment there, and a maid, and her baby. The baby's five."

"Tom, and when did she lose her husband?"

"Last year," Tom said, after an imperceptible pause.

"Oh, poor thing!" Kate exclaimed. "But she's older than Tom, to have a baby at that age," she added in her whirling thoughts.

"How did he die?" she added, at random. Anything to hold Tom in this confidential mood.

"From the first we liked each other," Tom went on, instead of answering, "and I got so that I liked going to her house—just to talk to her. She's not showy, but she's so gentle, and so sympathetic, and she's had such a rotten time!"

His voice broke on the last words, and he strode on again, passed the Walsh gate blindly and went down the street, and Kate went with him.

"Six weeks ago," Tom presently added, "she told me that her mother and father—they live in Ross Valley, and I guess they're rich, or well-to-do anyway,—that they had said she had to come home. They're backing her, and so she packed up, and started slowly home for America, by Rome and Naples. She isn't here yet; she'll get here in about a week, I guess.

"I stuck it out as long as I could; after she left Paris I nearly went mad. Then suddenly it came to me what was the matter with me, and I—quit. That was all. The minute I thought of following her home I couldn't wait, I was in a regular fever to get started; I broke up everything, and came. I had walked past her apartment a hundred times, and past the Park where I met her once with the little girl, and where we had tea, and I never realized it. And then suddenly I knew that I had to come after her, that was the whole of life for me.

"And I guess that's all, Kate," Tom finished, and was still.

Kate, from a laughing, mischievous interest and suspicion in Tom's

love affair, had developed strange emotions in the last five minutes. She was not laughing now: she was looking at him seriously, anxiously, with one hand on his arm.

"Tommy, dear, she's divorced?"

He hesitated, spoke very gently.

"Will be. She's going to apply for it."

"On your account, Tom?"

"Oh, no. I don't think so. It may be that I helped her to see that she could never be happy bound to him. I don't know. We've never said a sentimental word to each other, you know. But the man's a skunk. He brought another woman—well, anyway, Babette and her mother simply lit out, six months ago, and the mother established her in Paris. Then the mother came back: she has other kids. Now Babette is coming home, and I'm pretty sure she'll get a divorce. Meanwhile I'm going in with Father, in the business, and in less than a year I'll be——" His voice darkened boyishly. "Maybe," he ended, simply.

"Be able to marry?" the girl supplied.

"Well, I guess that's what I was thinking."

"Tom, are you so much in earnest?" Kate asked, after a troubled scrutiny of his dark and handsome face. "Have you thought about it? You know it will kill your mother. A divorced woman, and a Jewess——"

"It won't kill her," Tom said briefly, as Kate paused, genuinely appalled.

"It will break her heart," Kate amended.

"Only at first. When she gets to know Babette, she'll love her. Everyone does. It isn't always the fault of a girl of nineteen, Kate," Tom added, bitterly, "that she's married to a rotter. The man was ten years older than she. I imagine her father and mother are the simple, good sort—like my own people, in fact—they were no judges of character! The idea that she has to be tied to a man like that for life—ah, well!" Tom interrupted his own tirade wearily and impatiently. "What's the use of talking about it? Everybody that has any sense at all knows that it's not."

"Dear Tommy——" Kate was beginning quickly. But she interrupted herself, and stopped short. Why worry about it? It was all so hopeless; an affair with an older woman, who was also a Jewess, the divorce itself problematical, and the boy so young, and for the first time in love! A sudden wave of sympathy and affection enveloped Kate and she laid her hand impulsively on his shoulder. "Tommy dear, I hope it'll come out all right," she said.

When they went to open the oysters Aunt Maggie and their grandmother, a few moments later, Kate's eyes were so bright and Tom's manner with her so gentle and so attentive that Maggie's suspicions were promptly aroused, and on the following day she and Mollie and Allie Cunningham had a little council of war.

"They left this house at ten minutes past ten!" Mollie reiterated.

"And they never got to our house until eleven!" Maggie supplied, triumphantly.

"Well, God knows I and Peter don't want anything better for the boy!" Mollie remarked more than once piously. And if her sister-in-law shot her an occasional superior and quietly contemptuous glance at this statement, aloud Allie said only that it would be a funny thing if any boy didn't admire Kate, that was getting to be the handsomest thing the Lord ever made.

Tom indeed had not been at home three days before he discovered that he could be free for any evening walk by merely saying that he thought he "would drop around at the Library and see Kate." And sometimes he did really go there; Mrs Newman had not yet returned to San Francisco, and although Kate was not always an encouraging listener, she was always a most sympathetic one.

Handsome, vivacious, witty, and full of enthusiasm, he entered his father's business, and Peter's heart swelled with joy to have his splendid son beside him. Tom would sing his mother into happy tears, in the winter evenings, or sit beside her on the couch pulling Ellen's stiff pigtails; discussing their mutual friends and parties with Cecy; affording Martin occasional enlightenment with his lessons, rolling and tumbling Paul in affectionate big-brother fashion.

And at these times Mollie felt that her heart would burst within her with utter felicity. Here they all were, home again, safe and dear and happy, laughing and joking together like the children they really were! All her worries were laid to rest, and as she and Peter grew from an attitude of mere toleration toward Kate as Tom's sweetheart to genuine gratitude and enthusiasm, once more the thought of John Kelly and Cecy possessed them. John had long ago graduated in Mollie's thoughts from the place of the negligible "little Kelly boy"; he was Peter's right hand in the business, and Tom's office boss. To have Cecy recover from her fancy for the glittering charms of Dion Taylor, and Tom marry Kate—Mollie might well smile as she watched them all chattering together, or quarreling at "Five Hundred" in a fashion that brought the tears of laughter to her eyes.

"I suppose my son and his pretty cousin will make a match of it," Peter went as far as to say to John, just before Christmas.

"Miss Kate?"

"Kate, yes. She's not his full cousin, you know; the old lady married twice—both men named Walsh, as it happened; they may have been distant cousins, I don't know. But my wife was only the half-sister of Kate's poor father. At any rate, there's nothing to prevent their marrying, if they feel like it. And his mother and I begin to think that it will shape up that way."

"Is that so?" John said, thoughtfully. "She's"—he cleared his throat —"she's a beautiful girl," he added.

"Yes; Kate's a dear good ger'rl—she's an angel indeed to them poor old wrecks she lives with," Peter acknowledged. "Why them Walsh boys, Charley and Harry, don't blue-mold, settin' around the house, and leavin' the women cook for them," he added, shaking his head, "is more than I know! Kate's the pick of the bunch; she's got more to her than any of them."

"Tom's lucky," John commented, still in an odd, thoughtful tone.

"Kate is? Oh, you mean the boy is," Peter said. "Yes, they're both doin' good."

John Kelly, when Tom came into his office a few minutes later, found himself eyeing the boy curiously. Tom was certainly a figure to catch a girl's eye, John thought; tall, black, with color burning bright and clear on his high cheek-bones, and humor always ready to twitch at the handsome mouth. Tom shaved daily, his jaw was blue-black, his voice was delightful, and his flashing smile contagious and endearing, like a child's artless smile.

So he was going to marry the lovely Kate? His education completed without a moment's cost of care or concern to himself, John mused, his year abroad generously financed, his fortune secure, his place in the firm waiting, and now this beautiful girl.

And somehow, thinking of Kate, of the bright hair curling up against her hat, the movement of her fine mouth, the appeal in her blue eyes just before the flash of laughter extinguished it, and her patience with her wretched relatives, John felt something in his heart like a pain.

"I wish I was the one!" He said the words almost aloud, staring blankly beyond his high office windows across the descending roofs of the city to all the sharply pointed jumbled shipping at the waterfront. "I wish I was the one to take her out of that mean little cottage, and make a life for her!" John thought.

The thing had sprung full-fledged into being. It possessed him like an appetite. He got up, and stood looking out; far across the satin-blue stretch of the bay, where little ferry-boats were cutting their clean criss-crossed lines, to where Berkeley lay in a dull haze and glitter of sunshine, and his soul was sick within him.

"Why didn't I ever think of it before?' he said, aloud. "I can't cut in on him now—maybe I never could have had her. But it's—it's funny I never thought of it before! I surely would like to be the one to put pleasure into her life!"

CHAPTER IX

Mrs Newman returned to San Francisco three days before Christmas, which fell upon a Friday. On Wednesday she telephoned Tom, and asked him to come to have tea with her that afternoon.

The telephone message dropped quite simply into his office morning.

Miss Trent, who was John's stenographer, handed him the receiver, and Tom heard Babette's voice.

"Tom Cunningham? This is Babette Newman. You remember I promised to let you know when I got back. Well, here I am——"

Tom swallowed with effort and his voice was low and rough.

"W-w-where are you? I want so much to see you."

"I'm out in my own apartment on Gough Street. Could you come out at five, and have tea?"

"Five o'clock?" His senses were in such mad confusion that the words did not seem at that moment to fit into anything; she might have said fifty o'clock for all it conveyed to Tom.

"Yes." Ah, the husky sweetness and yet the odd definite quickness of the loved voice! "That's this afternoon," she elucidated.

"Yes, of course. Yes, I'll be delighted. At five." Tom hung up the receiver.

He looked about the office, everything was as usual. Miss Trent was typing busily, John's desk was empty, his papers and letters neatly arranged. A young boy was filing at a cabinet; Trueman was waiting with a handful of invoices.

Nobody was paying any attention to him. Yet Tom was trembling, and what occurred for the succeeding six hours was all a blank to him.

The moment came when he was free: twenty minutes before five. He had lunched somewhere, on something, with his mother, who was in a happy bustle of last shopping, and wanted Tom to help her select something for Papa. But where they went, or what they ate, or bought, or saw, or talked about, Tom could not have said upon his oath. He only lived for the late afternoon, for the shaking moment when he could take his overcoat, pick up his hat and his gloves, and slip away.

"Will you tell my father, if he should ask for me, that I have a little Christmas shopping to do, and have gone uptown?" he asked one of the women clerks.

"Your mother telephoned that she was going to call for both of you, with the car," Miss Duffy, who was already deeply in love with him, reminded him, by way of answer.

"Well, will you explain for me?" Tom said, with his direct, grave smile. "My father's not in his office just now."

"Oh, certainly," Miss Duffy said, completely overcome.

Tom went out. He walked to Geary Street, jumped on a car. He was in a fever; his eyes shining, his head one bewildered jumble, his heart thumping and his mouth dry. Here he was going out to see Babette.

He looked off at the dull, gray streets; the Christmas excitement of Polk Street, where women were crowding in and out of the lighted shops, and where cars were parked all along the curbs.

He was going to see Babette. Now, today, in a few minutes. Tom took off his gloves, and stuffed them into his overcoat pockets; took them out

and put them on again. Now, this afternoon, unless something happened, he would see her.

Suppose a maid came out, and said that Mrs Newman had not come in yet? Tom's mouth filled with water, and his heart turned sick.

Van Ness Avenue. Franklin Street. "Lord, how slow these street-cars are, after an automobile!" Tom thought. Gough Street. Tom nodded at the conductor.

Two blocks still to go; he walked them rapidly, in a dream, mounted the brick and stone steps of a handsome apartment house, found the bell, and pressed it with a finger-tip that was unsteady.

Something clicked; Tom was inside, he was taking himself up to the sixth floor in a self-operating elevator; he had rung the bell of number twenty-two.

A maid appeared; smiled. Would he step in? Just a moment, and Mrs Newman would be there. Tom stepped in, to a pretty chintzy room where windows opaque in the twilight gave obliquely upon a marine view, and where a pink lamp had been lighted.

His heart was beating violently; pulses hammered in his temples. He stood at the windows, staring out at big lighted houses where shades were being drawn against the winter dusk, and where wreaths and the lifted arms of Christmas trees were already visible.

In a few moments now. In a few seconds. She was here. Nothing would rob him now of his golden hour with her—tea with Babette again.

He heard the voice of the French maid, Germaine, and the voice of little Jean, Babette's daughter, five years old. They were chattering in French: "the child speaks exquisite French," Tom thought, confusedly, his heart thundering. "That's the advantage—when they're little——"

Their voices approached, sounded near in the little entrance hall, vanished. Germaine was perhaps taking the little girl with her into the kitchen, for tea preparations.

And somewhere in these few small, strange rooms, so daintily ordered, so fragrant, so still, Babette was making ready to see him. A French clock in crystal and gold ticked smartly; there were Dresden statuettes and Italian cottons and Chinese bronzes and ivory trifles in the room; argosies from all the world had contributed to the environment of Babette.

Suddenly she was beside him, a slim dark young woman, not tall, with her thick black hair cut short over her ears, and giving an almost Egyptian look to her seriously smiling face.

"Tom Cunningham," said the remembered voice, in a pleased tone. They sat down. "Just in time to say 'Merry Christmas'," Babette observed, gaily.

She was twenty-seven, two years older than Tom, but she looked like a charming girl in her teens, or perhaps more like a charming boy. Babette was flat-breasted, slim, all her lines were straight and young. Her dark eyes were almond-shaped, with just a trace of an oriental lift at

their corners, and there was black down shadowing the beautiful scarlet line of her lips. She spoke slowly, almost drawlingly, and often with a characteristic, quizzical smile in her half-shut eyes.

Tom, taking his tea from her, feeling himself somehow large and awkward in her little toy parlor, was conscious of an odd sense of anti-climax. He had been straining toward this moment for hours, thinking of it for weeks. Now he could not quite think why. Just for tea, in an ordinary little Gough Street flat, with a charming young woman who talked Paris and music and climate?

"You may see this in the paper, and so you may as well know," she said, presently. Tom felt a shock. This was something less than friendship. Because he might see it in the paper he might as well know——! "I have come home for my divorce," said Babette. "My father and mother feel very badly about it, and that makes it hard for me. But I shall file my suit on Tuesday. I've been with my lawyer all afternoon. A nice way to spend Christmas Eve, isn't it?" she ended, with her grave smile.

An awkward impulse possessed Tom. Poor little thing, she would be alone on Christmas Day! Would his mother, would his father raise an awful row—he supposed innocently that they might—if he asked her to Christmas dinner at home?

He could tell them he wasn't in love with her, nothing like that. But it was hard for her, alone——

"You'll have Christmas dinner here?"

"Oh, dear me, no! We'll have a tribal meal, in my father's house, in Ross Valley—about twenty of us," Babette answered, smiling ruefully. And instantly she underwent a sort of readjustment in Tom's estimation. She was no wandering solitary, to be pitied. She belonged to a group, and a not unimportant group.

"My own people are in town this evening, to have dinner with an aunt—my Aunt Bertha," Babette further explained. "There was a little awkwardness——

"Well, I'll tell you," she interrupted her own thoughtful tone suddenly. "This Aunt Bertha is an elderly widow, a certain Mrs Napthaly, and she is also my husband's aunt, or second cousin, rather. She brought him up. So Max—that's Mr Newman, is dining there tonight and, as I haven't yet applied for my divorce, nobody will believe I am in earnest, and I imagine——"

She stirred her cup, looked down into it.

"I imagine," she added, looking up with a little scornful smile, "that the idea was that Max and I were to see each other—forgive and forget. But I never could forgive him, never want to," added Babette, shrugging, and narrowing her eyes again. "Forgiveness," she said, superbly, "doesn't happen to be a weakness of mine!"

The fascination she had had for him during all these weeks of separation, the remembered strange fascination that he could neither define nor

analyze, suddenly had hold of him again. He forgot who he was—who she was—everything became vague, the actual outlines of the room about him blurred suddenly in Tom's consciousness, and he trembled.

"I dread the publicity," Babette said, simply. "But I won't have that man have any authority over my baby, ever again, or over me. Talk to me about something else, Tom, forget all this unpleasantness."

She had never called him "Tom" before. Tom, shaken by the name, and the glimpse into her confidence, duly talked. He told her of the big house that was hung with wreaths and filled with packages and excitement and holiday turkeys and pies. Babette took a deep interest in Cecy and Cecy's admirer. One of the San Mateo Taylors? That was the pretty sister, who was to have become a nun?

Deeper and deeper into intimacy went the conversation; there were pauses, but pauses filled with a sort of dramatic consciousness. Babette said she knew just how Cecy felt. Tom had never been in love?

"Not that I ever was," she said, regretfully. "My parents made my marriage. Max Newman is twelve years older than I. The last man that I would ever have chosen for a husband.

"I had six years of misery, six whole years, Tom," she went on, presently, "and then things got—terrible. I went home to my father and mother; they sent me back to him. I was so young—how could I hold him? There were other women—everything! One day, I had a check from my father for my birthday—a thousand dollars. I simply packed a trunk, took the baby, begged my mother to go with me, and left for Paris. Imagine the courage! When I got there I had less than two hundred dollars. But my father's cable and check were waiting for me, and after that both he and Max sent me money regularly."

"It must have been hard for you to take Mr Newman's money," Tom suggested, as she fell silent, her eyes on space.

"It wasn't!" she answered, a little surprised, even a trifle sharply. "I had given him six of the best years of my life; he certainly owed me something! He's a prosperous man, and he would be a rich one if he'd live a little differently. I'm asking three hundred a month alimony and the custody of the child—and not much to show for the sacrifice of my entire youth!"

Tom felt chilled again, vaguely. The women of his world did not ever take this tone. Yet she was right, she was speaking logically and justifiably.

"You've had a rotten time," he said.

"Awful," she agreed, quietly, gratefully.

"And afterward?" asked Tom.

"Afterward, Paris. The refuge of the lonely!" she answered, smilingly. And suddenly she got to her feet, dropping the little tea-napkin beside her cup. "Come on—one song!" she commanded.

Her touch on the piano was exquisite, her voice clear and true. She sang unaffectedly, and Tom experienced the remembered delight of afternoons in gray, rainy, wonderful Paris, as he sang.

Afterward he had to go; the little girl came in, and Babette reminded her of Mr Cunningham, who had brought her brioches and babas at Rumpelmeyer's?

Jean Newman was dark, fairylike, with straight black hair falling in a silky mane upon her broad lace collar. Her short velvet frock showed her bare little thin legs far above the knee. She climbed quite composedly to Tom's lap.

"We are to be here most of the time," Babette told him. "It is easier for my father and mother to have me here than at home where my sisters and brother are—during the unpleasantness. And I prefer it, too!"

"Could you dine with me now and then?" Tom asked. And immediately he thought of himself making excuses to his mother, and selecting some inconspicuous restaurant.

"Not while these legal proceedings are going on," she reminded him, and Tom, departing, was conscious of something like relief.

Yet the thought of her was strangely warm in his heart. Already he was planning to see her again. This was Thursday; if she went to Ross Valley tonight, returning on Monday, applied for her divorce on Tuesday, might he perhaps see her on Wednesday?

All other relationships and engagements faded into unimportance, Babette was the one reality in his life. His mother, Kate, the family, the business were shadows: shadows thrillingly intensified, it was true, by the fact of Babette, but nothing in themselves.

In the quiet talk and the cup of tea today there had been nothing sensational. Just her voice, the clink of spoons, the glow of lamps against windows soft in winter dusk. But remembering it, Tom felt almost suffocated with felicity. Babette's little drawing room was to him like a hidden pool in a deep forest, a little unknown corner of the great world where he could disappear, for draughts of exquisite friendship, music, inspiration.

She was interested in him—nobody else was. She asked him personal questions: "But you don't look as if you'd ever had a sick day. But surely you've studied music more than one little year?" she said. She smiled at him.

Tom, within half a dozen blocks of his home, dropped from the streetcar, and walked along in the sharp winter dusk. He must have a few more moments to remember that smile. A flaming sunset had died in the west at five o'clock; now, an hour later, there was still a smoldering glow upon the cold sky, crossed by sullen strips of curled black cloud.

Mission Street was sparkling with Christmas lights; the windows of the market were wreathed with evergreen and lined with frosted steam. Turkeys dangled, stark and white, their great purple heads balled in bloody paper. Oranges sent golden lights into the night. The drug-store windows were bedded deep in candy. Tubs of colored sweets were ranked at the grocery doors, barrels of scarlet cranberries. Women, for the most part humble and shabby women, were busy with late marketing, shawls

bundled about their shoulders, small bundled children dragged at their sides.

Tom, his hands in his overcoat pockets, walked slowly. Yet he reached home much too soon. Its sweetness, its delicious meaning, its marvelous potentiality, had lost none of their fresh appeal to his memory, that smile of Babette.

He deliberately laid away the thought of it, only a hundredth part sensed, remembered, analyzed. The instant he was alone he would take it out again, it and a thousand other thrilling recollections, all so peculiarly, so enchantingly his own, to be read and re-read under the very eyes of his family, like a book whose language they did not understand, or studied like gems they did not recognize.

He burst into the Cunningham house, in such a gale of noise and high spirits that Mollie, hearing him from her bedroom, and knowing Kate was downstairs with the others, smiled in deep satisfaction to herself. Mollie loved the festival of Christmas, the happiness, the holiness, and the domesticity of it. To get each and every one of the children what he wanted, and more than he had dared to ask; to have laughter, thanks, affection ruling the household throughout the long day of presents, feasting, and praying, was to her to be transported to some place better than the everyday world.

There was a pin-prick this year: Cecy was going to the Taylors' for New Year's Eve. But in the happiness of the present moment Mollie was willing to forget that. She and both daughters had been to the big charity tree of the Francesca Sewing Society that afternoon, had seen dolls and books and candy and clothes distributed, and had heard the songs. Tomorrow would be the "Holy Family" tree, with more gift-giving and youthful rejoicing. Afterward they would all go down to church together, for a "visit," and then home for tree-trimming and stocking-filling until midnight, with all the alarm clocks set for five o'clock Mass on Friday.

So tonight was cloudless, and when John Kelly came in with a message for Peter after dinner, Mollie sent him upstairs, with a mysterious and important whisper.

"He's laying down, Jawn, he don't feel terrible good. The children are all in the settin' room, and I think Kate and Tom's still in the dining room. And Cecy's in there——" and Mollie nodded toward the little-used parlors.

The big house smelled deliciously of pine, there was a flow of soft golden light from the sitting-room door, a subdued light in the hall, and John could see that the candles were still burning in the dining room. The parlor door was shut. Cecy was in there with her beau, alone, John thought. But Kate was in the dining room.

Very deliberately he walked toward the dining-room door, stopped upon the threshold.

"No, not there, Jawn!" Mrs Cunningham warned him, happily. "Sure

the whole house is full of the young folks tonight!" she added, with a distracted laugh. "It'll be one scald gone when they all marry and take themselves off! Mr Cunningham's upstairs, Jawn; he's layin' down."

"Ah——?" John apologized, as if corrected. And he went quietly upstairs. But he had seen Kate and Tom, loitering on at the almost cleared dinner table, in that moment's pause on the threshold.

Tom had been seated with his back to the door, his chair twisted about so that he sat facing Kate, who had the one at the head of the table. His elbow had been propped on the rumpled cloth, and his black head resting in his hand.

Kate, thoughtful and evidently preoccupied, had been resting her head on her hand too, the fine spread fingers pushing up her crown on chestnut-gold hair. She was wearing an old black lace gown, low in the neck and short in the sleeves; her beautiful breast was bare. Her lashes were lowered, throwing a deep shadow on her cheeks, her brows drawn together in a faint frown; she had been speaking in a low tone, and without meeting her companion's eyes.

They were absorbed. They did not notice John when he came, or when he went. But he wished that he had not seen them.

When he came downstairs, half an hour later, after a conference with Peter, who was comfortably sprawled on a couch, with his gray socks and stained vest in full view, Dion Taylor was leaving, and he and Cecy were standing together in the hall.

As John quite unavoidably joined them, and both greeted him, Kate and Tom came out from the dining room, too, and Kate gave John her hand.

"My cousin—Miss Walsh—and this is Mr Taylor, Kate," Cecy said, confusedly. Kate turned a keen look upon Dion, and for a moment they looked levelly at each other. In the soft light of the fir-scented hall, with the general cheerful stir and murmur of the Christmas holidays brightening the big rooms and infecting the very servants, as they came and went, all the young persons were perhaps conscious of an unwonted sense of happiness and well-being; it was as if each one of them was glad to be himself, for the moment, young, beloved, brimming with health and high spirits. Kate laughed with Dion, and Tom with both; John found himself laughing, too.

Dion had to go; the others went into the sitting room, and there was much talk of presents and Christmas plans. "I think it was awfully nice of Dion to rush out here for a few minutes; he's on his way to a party," Cecy kept saying, as if to herself.

Mollie, coming downstairs after settling off Paul and Ellen, at nine o'clock, saw the four deep in conversation before the fire. Weary from shopping, praying, bustling about generally as she was, she padded upstairs again, to coax Peter to come take a peep.

"Just as far as the landin', Peter. 'Twill do your heart good."

Peter cautiously followed her halfway down the stairs. He stood

there, the evening paper dangling from his hand, a quiet chuckle shaking him.

Through the open sitting-room door they could see them; the lights had been lowered, but there was a glow from the coal fire. It shone upon Cecy, seated beside the big chair, with her arm across Kate's knee. Tom and John were side by side on the big davenport, Tom flung luxuriously back, studying the girls with half-shut eyes, John sitting forward, with his locked hands dropped between his knees. Kate was in Peter's chair, and the beauty of her shining head, her slender relaxed body, her blue eyes set in their smoky shadows, the clean line of her raised chin, and the earnestness with which she was talking, impressed this rather unimaginative uncle and aunt with a feeling of surprise and of something like awe.

"Ah, Peter," Mollie said, softly, as they crept back. "Isn't Christmas sweet? The little ones tucked into their beds, and the big ones down there, with Kate holding them so still. She'll make a lovely daughter to us, one of these days!"

"The boy is very lucky," Peter agreed, smiling more than once, and raising his eyes to look thoughtfully off from his paper more than once, before he could settle down to read again.

Downstairs they rambled cheerfully from one idle topic to another. Tom had been to Midnight Mass at Notre Dame in Paris, a year ago. Kate had heard that the street riots were the reason why there was to be none here this year. But then why have New Year's Midnight Mass, asked Cecy. Yes, that was funny, they all agreed. What did Kate want for Christmas?

This last was John. Kate, upon reflection, said that as she would be twenty-three on her next birthday, she thought it was about time she wanted a husband. Whom would John suggest?

Not himself, he supposed? Well, no, she couldn't exactly accept him bold-faced, like this. He must make her a more spontaneous offer, Kate said.

He would remember that. Tom said suddenly that, in the firelight, she was beautiful. No, honestly, he persisted, as she made herself more beautiful than ever with a slow smile, honestly she was beautiful.

"You mean with all the lights out, except the piano light, and my face in shadow?" Kate asked, lazily, turning, in the big chair, a body whose every curve and line was exquisite. The slim ankle, the rounded bare arm with its beautifully modeled shoulder, the white throat against which the frail old black lace stamped a delicate pattern, the clean chin, the rising swell of the young, firm breasts, and the straight, flat hips as trim as a boy's, under the black, thin gown, were all perfection.

"Kate, why am I not in love with you?" Tom asked, pathetically. And instantly the thought of Babette's room came before him, and his senses experienced a sort of swoon of delight.

"I don't know, Tommy, I thought you were!" Kate answered, aggrievedly. And the upcurving lashes were lifted, and she looked straight at John with her blue, blue eyes, and said, or rather screamed at him, in her soul: "Oh, you fool—you fool! Can't you see *anything?* Why aren't *you?*"

John stared into the fire. Their happy bantering with the great subject hurt him vaguely, but he did not know why.

And Cecy, unusually silent and thoughtful tonight, stared into the fire, too. It was a little thing, a trifle, but Dion had hurt her tonight. Dion incessantly hurt her. Cecy wondered if she was too sensitive, too exacting? She had been hungering for months, hungering her cheerful, normal self into a thin and anxious shadow, for something definite from him.

He liked her—oh, but of course! He made no secret of that. Since their meeting last April—Cecy hated to think that it was eight long-ago months—he had sought her out, complimented her, made her conspicuous with his attention. He had come up to the Lake, he had given her flowers and candy, written her when he was away—but that was all.

And much as that was in her eyes, much as such attentions from a Taylor must be in any girl's eyes, rationally analyzed, yet Cecy knew in her sore heart how many of the small yet indispensable indications of a true love affair were lacking.

She had given him her heart wholly, and almost instantly. She could not take it back. When Dion was kind to her, and when they were seeing each other often, then Cecy was happy. She had been happy, ecstatically happy, tonight, when Ida had come in to the dinner table to say "Mr Taylor to see Miss Cecilia."

Cecy, rising fluttered and radiant from her seat, had had a moment of delight. Dion had had an engagement this evening, a dinner engagement. And he had broken it to come and see her!

Always at his handsomest in his evening clothes, tall, self-possessed, with the admiration she loved to see in his eyes, he had greeted her gaily. And Cecy had said——

She could not bear to think what she had said. Because it immediately developed that he had not broken his dinner engagement at all; he was on his way there. He had just wanted to tell her the final arrangements for Thursday night, New Year's Eve.

So the glow had faded for Cecy, and for a few minutes life had not seemed worth the living.

Gradually that glow was returning. He *had* come to see her, after all, instead of telephoning. And she *was* going down to stay with his mother on New Year's Eve. What girl in her senses would not find this prospect significant, as well as enchanting?

But Cecy's heart grew sick and weary of the incessant process of reasoning and computing that seemed a part of this strange, burning friendship. She had known him much less than a year, yet she had an incessant gnawing feeling that somehow the bloom had gone from their

friendship; she hated to remember the glory and thrill that had belonged to its very beginning.

If he wasn't in love with her, why did he come to see her, and murmur wonderful things to her the instant they were alone?

And if he was, why didn't he say so? Cecy had grown utterly despondent, waiting for him to speak. Sometimes, just as she fancied that the definite moment had come, he would speak casually of an engagement with some other girl: "I'm taking Elinor Harvey to luncheon tomorrow. She's great fun!"

Sometimes, on the other hand, when he spoke of some wonderful party just ahead, and when Cecy would express wistfully her hopes that he would enjoy it, he would bring the blood dancing back to her heart in a flood, and make the day glorious by answering: "Let's not go to things like this when we're married. I hate 'em, really!"

The girl would take out his notes, and compare them. Were the earlier ones really warmer than those that followed, or was it just that the novelty of his devotion had intoxicated her into reading between the lines? They were not many, nor eloquent; Dion was no scholar. Cecy kept them all, seventeen letters, a score of cards that had come with candy and flowers, and two or three telegrams. She knew them by heart; she knew in just which one he had said, "dearest little girl." She hated the receding date of that letter: October tenth. It was December now—almost the new year.

She was dreaming of the new year tonight, wondering if her marriage would take place before another Christmas. And if it did not, thought Cecy in a sort of panic, then what? What would have happened? By what agonizing stages would her whole bright dream have faded, leaving her for ever changed and saddened and unsatisfied?

Well, there was the New Year's party. Anything might happen at the party. She was to be the guest of Mrs George Taylor for Thursday night, and Dion would drive her home on Friday.

John was thinking that he wished Kate's affair with Tom would accelerate, would finally be over. He would have to smile through the announcement, the engagement, the wedding. He hoped they would make it all quick.

Kate had taken Tom to the piano, and they were murmuring, laughing, singing there. Tom's voice rang out gloriously, he bent his head, his cheek brushed Kate's, and she laughed with her magnificent shadowed eyes only a few inches from his own.

"My true love has my heart,
And I——and I have his!"

Tom sang. He interrupted himself: "Try the second, Kate; I'll sing softly."

"Tom, I haven't any voice!" But she was obedient, and their tones rose and fell together.

"By just exchange,
The one to the other given!"

"I hope you're going to let me have the pleasure of taking you home, Kate," John presently said.

"Oh, I'm staying with Cecy tonight, thank you, John!"

Her fingers rippled on the keys again; she was set glowing in the corner of the darkened room, in a sort of pool of light.

"Try this, Tom. We've not sung this for years!

"Oh, that we two were Maying!"

Cecy smiled idly, sympathetically, at John. Tom's voice swelled out superbly. Kate whisked a page over, laughed and rippled on.

"That's Kate and Tom," Mollie said, in deep satisfaction upstairs, to Allie. "Has Cecy come up? Did Jawn Kelly go? I'll bet they're alone down there——"

CHAPTER X

THERE was no Midnight Mass, on the last night of the year, after all, so that Mollie was consoled in that particular, as regarded Cecy's absence, and the Crowley girls and Kate came into the Cunninghams' late on the afternoon of New Year's Eve, and saw Cecy's triumphant departure. When the girl herself observed how impressed Regina and Bernadette Crowley were at the mere idea of her being whisked off in the Taylor car, under the escort of the Taylors' son, to the Taylors' actual home in fashionable San Mateo, her spirits and self-confidence rose.

And she had need of them. For by this time Cecilia had worked herself into a state of such agonizing doubt and discouragement that when her mother had brought her in a breakfast tray at ten o'clock, she had declared, almost with tears, that she wished the whole thing was over, and that she were dead.

"You had too good a time at the Cudahys'," Mollie had diagnosed without apprehension, in reference to an innocent little holiday party to which Tom had taken his sister the evening before.

Cecy, sipping her coffee, had said nothing in answer. But she could have laughed aloud. A spider-web of colored strings to unravel, a supper of lemonade, cocoanut cake and peppermint wafers, and dancing afterward to music from the Victrola! To Cecilia Cunningham such an affair would never be satisfying again.

"Mama, look what's coming on my chin. Isn't that maddening?"

Mollie had inspected a slight eruption.

"That'll never show, lovey. Put a little powder over it."

"Yes, but, Mama, it feels as if it was sticking out a foot! Give me that mirror, will you, Ellen?" And Cecy had stared at herself in the glass scowlingly. "I'm getting fat," she had said, despondently.

This was the keynote of her mood for the day. She had presently gotten up, opened her suitcase upon her unmade bed, and proceeded to drift aimlessly about the upper floor, rolling silk stockings, looking at herself in every mirror she passed, fretful with Ellen, and darkly gloomy about the prospect of the Taylor visit.

"Aunt Allie, did you see a package for me?"

"You mean the writing paper that come Monday?"

"Oh, *no!* I mean a flat envelope—it just had a pair of gloves in it! It should have come Wednesday—yesterday."

"What possessed you, with your good strong legs, that you'd send home a little envelope with gloves in it?" Aunt Allie, diverted, had demanded in surprise.

"Oh, *please,* Aunt Allie!" Cecy had been ready for tears. An exhaustive, but unsuccessful, search for the gloves had ensued, during which Cecy had strongly hinted her suspicions of Ellen and Mart as grabbers and ruiners of everything that came into the house, and had reduced Ellen to tears.

However, when Aunt Allie had obligingly gone downtown for more gloves, and Cecy had packed her bag charmingly, with the neat brown linen covers Kate had monogrammed in cross-stitch for her Christmas present neatly smoothed over the slippers and frock, the beribboned nightgown and the silver-backed brushes, and when the Crowleys had chanced to come in, to be openly impressed and envious, Cecy felt better.

She had on her "good" hat, as her mother always called it, and the skirt of her new suit; over her pretty lace corset-cover she wore a loose silk kimono. Her cheeks, with the powdering of gold freckles over their healthy, sturdy red, blazed with excitement; she had drawn her curly dark hair becomingly below the hat brim, her Christmas furs, yellow-tipped fox-skins, lay with her gloves and jacket on the bed.

"Oh, you'll have a grand time, there was a lot about it in the paper this morning," Kate said. "There's going to be a hundred people there!"

"Goodness! How would they ever feed them? Like a hotel, I guess," Bernadette Crowley commented. Cecy, buffing her shining nails, could hardly believe in her own good fortune. These other girls, just as good and just as pretty, prettier indeed, than she was, mere lookers-on. And she—she going to the Taylors' New Year's dance!

She put on her best frilly waist, her coat, powdered her nose again, flung the fox-skins about her shoulders, caught up her gloves and her big coat. Ready.

"Here's your beau," Kate announced, from the window that gave her a view of the front door. She wondered why Dion Taylor had come into the Library to waste half an hour in her society, more than once, in the past fortnight. She wondered if Cecy knew it.

"I'll go down," Cecy said, in a flutter. She kissed her mother, Martin caught up her suitcase, and she ran downstairs.

It was a soft, sunless day; fog was lingering in the chilly wide spaces of Golden Gate Park, and as they took the Colma road they were softly, noiselessly enveloped in it. Cecy looked out of the car windows, and said to herself: "I ought to be enjoying this—just the ride. Many a girl would never have as much as this, just this ride, and these furs, and all my nice clothes, and rich friends."

But she was not enjoying herself. Once again she was analyzing, doubting, heartsick.

To begin with, at her father's door she had taken the front seat, next to Dion, in the big empty car. And there had been perhaps a full minute of felicity, as they swept through the dreaming winter silence of the Mission. Then Dion had said:

"Here, what am I doing? I've got to stop for Mrs Williams and Julia!"

Natural enough, that insatiable tribunal in Cecy's soul had decided. His mother was giving a big party, of course there were other guests to transport to and fro.

So they had gone to the Williamses' magnificent mansion in Pacific Avenue. And before Julia and her mother came out to the car Dion had said, with the assurance that was characteristic of him:

"Let's see, perhaps you'd better get in the back, Cecy. Then I can stack all the luggage in front, next to me."

So Cecy had changed her seat, and had been introduced to a handsome middle-aged woman, exquisitely rouged, marcelled, veiled and furred, and to a beautiful girl quite as conscientiously groomed. Julia was just home from an Eastern school; she was a vivacious little creature, not in the least sentimental or flirtatious, excited over a lumpy puppy hound which she was bringing with her, and full of plans for the summer.

"And in England we'll be with the Kents—that utterly adorable Captain I nearly ran off with, and *would* have run off with if he'd had the railway fare, or I'd had my allowance on time!" Julia chattered. "But my father never sends me my allowance until I'm out on the street begging, with a dog and a stick, and consequently I'm an old maid! Sit up, puppy-doodle—was a tootems!" she added, laying her lovely face against the dog's little slobbering nuzzle. "I don't know what your mother will say to my bringing this brute, Dion, but I go to the Hoods' tomorrow, you know, and his mammy's there, and I thought she'd like to see him as a New Year's surprise. I suppose she'll bite him!"

"What'j' name him, Julia?" Dion, who was driving with a sort of sidewise negligence, asked, grinning.

"I told you."

"You did not."

"Why, you big liar! I told you on Christmas Day."

Cecy's sick little heart registered it. He had seen Julia on Christmas

Day. Well, she had probably been down in San Mateo, staying at some house where he had called, or perhaps it was at the club.

"You did not." The conversation was continuing.

"I named him Run," announced Julia, "because he came in my Christmas stocking."

Dion shouted, and glanced at Cecy for sympathy. And Cecy smiled quickly, even laughed briefly, but too late. She had not heard what Julia said, she had been too deeply absorbed in her own wretched thoughts. Dion's look had caught her with a grave, almost frowning face.

"You might just as well not grow fond of him, dear," Mrs Williams now said, in her clear, incisive tones, "because I certainly should not advise your taking him with you back to Miss Endicott's."

"*You* say, Mabel," Julia returned, laughing. And she stood the puppy on his shaky hind legs, and put his irresponsible little forepaws against her cheeks.

Cecy was not, it appeared, to stay in the Taylor house. Julia was. But Cecy was to be just across the garden in the Haviland house.

The Havilands were abroad. They had loaned their beautiful home to Mrs Taylor for the occasion, and it had been opened and warmed, beds made, flowers set all about, new magazines and cigarettes strewn here and there to give it an occupied look. And a faded, gentle woman of about forty, addressed familiarly by everyone as "Miss Isabelle," and evidently a sort of confidential secretary or servant or domestic factotum, was playing hostess here.

Well, Cecy reasoned, that was all right. The Williamses would naturally stay in the Taylor household, for Mrs Williams was Mrs Taylor's best friend. It was enough—it *ought* to be enough, for little Cecilia Cunningham to be here at all!

It was impressive, perhaps, to have a maid unpack one's belongings, hang one's dress on a hanger, set out brushes and creams in orderly rows, but it was a little oppressive, too. It was wonderful to have a whole big shining enamel bathroom to oneself, violet-scented soap, fluffy washrag monogrammed "L. G. T.", but Cecy was nervous and lonesome.

Miss Isabelle to be sure came in before she had quite finished dressing, and was extremely kind, hooked the new gown, and commented admiringly upon the silky hair.

"You don't mean it? Is that natural? I never saw hair so curly before. Just look——" And Miss Isabelle had put a finger through one of the little temple rings. "Well, you certainly are lucky," she said. "You better bring your coat downstairs; it's only a few feet across to the Taylor house, but it certainly is cold tonight."

Downstairs were two pretty sisters, the Watsons, and half a dozen young men, and the chaperon of the group, which was already hilariously calling itself the "Haviland Roadhouse Gang." This chaperon was a thin, dark, vivacious woman, twice divorced, evidently regarded with great favor as a funmaker, interested to the exclusion of almost every other

topic in the no-fat diet that she was rigorously observing, and tonight submerged by a heavy cold that her hoarseness, sniffling, and constant recourse to damp, fine handkerchiefs kept uppermost in everyone's mind.

"Cub on, childred,—oh, lissed to be!" said this unfortunate, laughing at herself as heartlessly as they did, and marshaling them to the Taylor house. She admitted that she was living merely for the bridge game that would follow the dinner, as laughing loudly in the soft, early winter moonlight, they trooped across the short stretch of bare garden.

Cars were wheeling up in great fans of light, discharging more muffled and laughing figures; greetings flew back and forth as they all bundled into the warmth and light and perfume and confusion indoors.

"Oo—fires! Oh, warm my hands, I'm friz! Mrs Taylor, M'ma said to be sure to tell you—— Oh, hello, darling! aren't you grand? Oh, aren't they, but the handsomest broke off, I could have shrieked—— Hello—hello, I didn't know you were back! Oh, a fire—let me get to that fire! No, we came with Helen, she's here somewhere—— You look simply gorgeous—— Oh, let me see it? It's stunning. Caroline has emeralds and one diamond—— Hello, darling. Oh, hel*lo,* I thought you'd gone to Santa Barbara!"

Cecy smiled, moved about a little vaguely, in the inattentive groups, now and then caught Dion's eye, and always evaded it again promptly, lest he should feel her somewhat strange and unattached state a burden upon him. Presently he put her in charge of a nice older girl named Gilda.

"Sit here next to Gilda, Cecy. Miss Cunningham, Miss Bates. Pipe her off to this crowd, will you, Gilda? She's trying to get her bearings in this crew of roughnecks."

Cecilia tried to talk, to unbend, to get started into a natural and spontaneous conversation. It was the start that was hard, that was all, she told herself. Once launched, and confident, she could be quite as entertaining as the funniest of this group.

They were not really funny, they were just noisy and daring; screaming whatever they thought at the top of their lungs, and trusting that the next speech, instantly following, would carry on the general impression of high spirits and wit.

Little repeated phrases went on between them incessantly, always to be greeted with shouts of appreciative laughter. "You're a trim, tidy little liar," "Open plumbing," and "Where did the child get those hazel eyes?" were three that Cecy heard over and over.

"I couldn't. M'ma was sick."

"You're a trim, tidy little liar, Margaret. You were lunching downtown that same day."

"I was not."

"You were. And with the 'andsome horficer, of course."

"What, in full view, in the St Francis? Oh, Margaret!"

"You're all trim, tidy little liars."

"Open plumbing, I call it!"

And then a girl's voice, idle, lazy, drawling:

"Where does the child get those hazel eyes?" And the usual shouts of laughter.

They sat around in large, magnificently furnished rooms eating tiny canapés at a single bite, rumpling delicate little napkins, and changing cocktail glasses, for a long half hour, and loitered out to dinner just before nine. Cecy drew a deep sigh of relief when she found her seat; she had never seen either of the men beside her before, but at least she felt less neglected and forlorn here between them than she had been in the drawing rooms.

Oh, if it were only over—only over! The evening stretched before her full of horrible potentialities for humiliation and embarrassment. Who would dance with her? She didn't know anybody. Julia was seated next to Dion. And when Cecy, looking up the long table, saw that, suddenly she felt dull, indifferent, and weary. Her hope, her confidence were like rubber bands that have been sprung until they can spring no longer. She could not tell herself that Julia was an old friend, home from school for only a few weeks, and to be gone again in a few days now.

No, she determined recklessly to have a headache. She would excuse herself early, let them see the year out without her. She would go home tomorrow, cast herself upon her bed, and lie there until she was dead. She hated them all. Let them think what they would of her, she was done with them!

Dion looked down the table at her, winked at her. And Cecy smiled brightly back, and turned vivaciously to her neighbor. He was a nice boy, almost as much a stranger as she was, as it chanced, and he shyly asked her to dance with him, when, just as the marvelous third course, of shrimps and oysters and chicken and lobster, was placed before them, the orchestra started temptingly in the next room, and almost every one of the thirty diners rose wordlessly and simultaneously.

About eleven o'clock those who had been invited to come to the dance following the dinner began to troop in, and presently everybody went into the ballroom, which had been turned into the semblance of an Italian roadside hotel, with whitewashed arbors strung with grapevines and tiny tables surrounded by green chairs. At everyone's place were a dozen noise-makers, long horns, buzzers, clackers, cymbals, whistles, gongs, and hammers, and long before midnight champagne was bubbling everywhere in the hollow-stemmed glasses, and being spilled on beautiful frocks, and dripping on the floor, and the racket was deafening.

Food was served again, and intermittent dancing began; twinkling atoms of colored and metal papers flew through the air, and paper ribbons whirled and sank, catching on the picture frames and tousling the women's beautifully arranged heads. Cecy saw a group of four or five hilarious young men, Dion among them, giving Julia Williams a "toboggan ride" in a small gilt chair. Julia sat with her feet tucked up, her

hands in the immense tissue-paper muff that was one of the favors, a tasseled bonbon cap set saucily upon her beautiful head, and her bodyguard pushed her with speed, violence, and recklessness between and around and frequently against the dancers.

In another corner Hungerford Johnson, an enormously wealthy man of about forty-five, kept attempting to sit down in a chair that another man, with a dexterous touch of his foot, each time innocently moved. The hysterical shrieks of several women, watching, obliged them to cling together for support.

There were several tables of bridge going busily, a tense silence during the quick fall of the cards, four faces watching shrewdly. And then babel during the interval for dealing and bidding.

When some of the guests who had to get to Menlo or the city began to go, Cecilia slipped away. Still rosy-cheeked, still smiling gallantly, not quite a wallflower, yet she was more glad to reach the security of her big, softly lighted room, where her nightgown was laid out, and her bed neatly turned down, than she had ever been glad to get anywhere in her life before.

And if it might have been her own room at home, next to her mother's room! But Cecilia would not think of that. She said her prayers without letting her thoughts wander for one second from Dion and his cruel, cheerful, apparently unconscious neglect of her, plunged into bed, put out her light, and buried her head deep in the covers.

But there was no escape from thought.

Ah, how she hated them all! And how she longed to be one of them! The richest, the most popular, the most prominent!

The next day Dion walked down with her alone, to show her his father's horses, and Cecy, in the new white sweater and smart flannel skirt, was idiotically happy. And then, at eleven, there was a little delicate conversation, about further plans, in which Dion's mother, knowing well that it was not true, said blandly:

"And I believe we have to get you back to town this morning?"

And Cecy, not meaning a word of it, answered regretfully:

"Yes, I hate to go. But I promised my mother—New Year's Day——"

"Oh, dear, we rather hoped you might lunch with us here!" Mrs Taylor dared to say. And Cecilia, who longed to stay, for everyone had been talking about the big New Year's lunch at the Burlingame Country Club, was just about to waver, in spite of her stern resolutions and indeed self-protective instincts to the contrary, when Dion said quickly: "Then I'll drive you in, all by my little self. I have to go in."

So that settled it. An eighteen-mile drive alone with Dion might set everything straight, and start the New Year in a rush of happiness for Cecilia. She flew upstairs to pack her bags.

But when she came down it was to find that Pertree, the fine old chauffeur, was to take her in instead. Dion was furious about it—he really seemed to be so, and spoke quite sullenly to his mother—but some

old friends from New York had just telephoned that they were in San Francisco, and coming down for luncheon, and Dion simply had to be there.

"Then you take me in, and bring them back?" Cecy had demanded, innocently.

Well, no; they were already on their way unfortunately. It was up to Dion to be Johnny-on-the-spot; he'd have to meet 'em—d'you see?—at the station; Pertree didn't know 'em by sight, and they didn't know Pertree; they might miss one another in the crowd—d'you see? There was nothing left for Cecilia to do but thank her kind hostess, leave good-by messages for her scattered fellow guests, and be put in solitary state into the big car.

Did she realize, with hot cheeks and a heavily aching head, as the motor rolled through the quiet, bare little country towns, watching with unseeing eyes the New Year's Day groups of well-dressed women and bundled babies that were moving about, did she realize that one phase of her friendship with Dion Taylor was gone for ever? That the spontaneous, glowing beauty of those April, those midsummer days, when he and she were so thrilled to find each other, when they loved to be together, loved the meeting of hands, and of glances, would never come back?

Perhaps she did. At all events, when she went into her mother's house Mollie knew, and with a sick heart, that something was amiss, and from that hour noted a change in Cecy.

The girl kissed her father, touching his rosy, healthy face with her own dry, burning cheek, answered his questions and her mother's languidly, and seemed most concerned, in all the memories of the visit, with compunction that she had offered the chauffeur a tip, and he declined it.

Only Peter and his wife were at home. The big house was silent, in beautiful order; the lower floor scented with food. In Cecy's room were roses; she snatched the card. "From the little girls of the Saint Ignatius Sewing Society, to their dear teacher."

The girl flung herself on her bed; at her mother's advice, crept into it; Mollie hoped she would sleep. Grandma and the uncles and Aunt Maggie and Jawn were all coming to New Year's dinner. The children had gone with Kate and Tom to the Dimonds' tree; they'd all been to "early," and Aunt Allie too "late" as well. What Mass had Cecy gone to?

For the first time in her life Cecy had forgotten Mass completely. She now lied readily and wearily. "Nine, in San Mateo."

"Nine, is it now?" Mollie asked, surprised. "It's always been eight and ten."

When the family came home at about four, Cecy pretended to sleep. She heard her aunts and Kate whispering as they peeped at her. Then they went away, and she lay thinking, thinking.

She was sick of her thoughts. Her hatred of life and all she found in it included her parents now. Why didn't they *know* the Peninsula set—the fashionable set? It was *their* fault that their daughter was ridiculous,

neglected. If they had built on Pacific Avenue or on Jackson Street, instead of out here in the old-fashioned, hopelessly uninteresting Mission, Cecy would know all that crowd, would have been really included, instead of politely tolerated, at their good times!

Dion would have been as eager to please her then, as he was the odious Williams girl. Perhaps now, now, thought Cecy, writhing as her fancy pictured it, he and Julia were playing golf together, tramping together, murmuring over the teacups in the club together.

At five she sent Ellen downstairs with a message to the effect that her head ached, and she wanted no dinner. Later, please, she would like to see Kate.

Almost immediately her door opened, and Cecy looked toward it languidly; it was Mama, of course, come to coax and pity her.

But it was her father, looking unusually grave.

"I think you'd better get up, Cecy," Peter said, briefly. "Your grandmother and the others will be here any moment. It's not polite for you to lay there, like a queen itself, and leave your mama the brunt of it. Get into your best dress and come down."

"Papa," Cecy pleaded, in ready tears, seizing his big hairy hand as he sat down on the edge of her bed, "please, *please* don't make me! I'm all worn out—I was up nearly all night——"

She doubled over in bed, and laid her wet face against her father's hand, and lay so, too utterly miserable to pretend any longer.

"Cecy," her father asked, presently, "did he ever ask you?"

The girl flung herself back on her pillow, her black hair tumbling off her flushed face, her cheeks quite frankly wet.

"Not—exactly," she answered, after a silence, staring into her father's eyes.

Peter moved his big thumb slowly over the hot drops that lay on his hand, keeping her own locked there the while.

"But he made love to you, dear?"

Cecy's nostrils flared, and she bit her lip. Fresh tears welled in her eyes, and her breast heaved. She nodded, unable to speak for the lump that had risen in her throat.

"Did you let him kiss you, Cecy?"

"At the Lake, yes, he did. But I didn't know he was going to!" Cecy admitted, in a thick tone, and with her lashes lowered.

"And he talked as if he liked you?"

"Oh, Papa——!"

"What do you think now, Cecy?" Peter demanded, after another long pause.

"I don't know," the girl answered, dully, looking into space.

None of the lights had been lighted, and in the spacious room the winter dusk was thickening to early darkness. From far downstairs they could hear the piano, a shout from Martin, Tom's voice. Ellen was having a quarrel with Aunt Allie in the hall; the woman's protest, "Not just

before your good dinner! Don't spoil your good dinner——" died away in the direction of the nursery.

Cecy felt that she could lie here for ever, safe in the protecting dark, holding tight to her father's strong hand. She moved it to her young breast and pressed it there. Peter sighed heavily.

"Would you marry him if he ast you that you'd be his wife?" the man asked, slowly.

"Oh, Papa——!" Cecy's tears rained down. "I will marry him or nobody ever in this world!" she said, passionately.

A silence. "But you talked that way about the convent, Cecy," Peter said, somewhat anxiously, then.

"The convent!" There was scorn almost to laughter in her tone.

"Is this so different, dear?"

"Different? But, Papa, Dion is my *life*. He's all I have. I never think of anything else. I never say my prayers without praying that he'll love me! I never go downtown that I don't hope that I'll meet him, or hear the telephone——"

Her voice thickened again, and she was still.

"Well, now, this party," Peter began again, after thought, "that didn't go so well? Was there other ger'rls there that maybe he liked better?"

Cecilia was silent. But her quick glance, surprised and shamed, answered him.

"Was he unkind to you, dear?"

Her voice was heavy with pain.

"Perhaps he didn't *mean* to be. But—they aren't exactly my sort——" she said hesitatingly.

"That's just it," Peter agreed, quickly, and was still. "If he was one of our own boys I'd know where to have him!" he presently added. "But what do I know of this feller that has more money than ten ought to have, and was raised like any Turk, for all I know, that would have a houseful of women to amuse him! Maybe Mama and I made a mistake—thinking it was for your happiness——" he muttered, half to himself.

And again for a long time they were silent.

"Well, you must live your life, lovey," the father said then, "and face it as best you can. If he's in earnest, he'll come after you—never fear! And if he's not, you must pray that you'd forget him as if he'd never been born. So now get up, and come down, and help your mama."

Cecilia, a ghostly little white figure in the gloom, rose up on her knees, and tightened her arms about her father's big bull-like neck.

"Papa, I love you!" she whispered, into his ear. And as Peter left the room he took his big crumpled handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

It was pathetic to both father and mother, after that, to see how meekly and patiently Cecilia tried to keep her own suffering from the family's eyes. As suddenly as he had come into her life, Dion Taylor for a time at least went out of it. There was simply no more of him; it was all over. He neither telephoned nor wrote to Cecy, nor came to see her, and she had nothing actual, and nothing spiritual or mental, by which to draw him back.

A few letters, a few happy memories, were all. And to balance this pitiful showing, every innocent and happy thing in her life had been torn away. The family group meant nothing now, her religion had become a mere form, books fell from her listless hands, and her mother's vague and timid comfort and philosophy struck against deaf ears. Nothing led to Dion again, to the old flattery, happiness, excitement, dreams, and Cecilia was hungering for these, and for nothing else.

The sudden stopping of an automobile before the house, the coming of the postman, a summons from Annie to the telephone would bring her fluttering color up, and change the expression in her eyes. But when the inevitable disappointment followed, she would sink still lower into the silence, the agony that Mollie could only watch in an agony of her own, equally acute.

"Maybe it's on'y a lovers' quarrel, dearie," the mother would suggest.

"Mama, there was no quarrel!"

"But then how did it all come to end so quick?" Mollie would demand, bewildered.

"Well, I suppose there was nothing to end." And the utter quiet dreariness of Cecy's voice would silence her mother. There seemed to be nothing to say.

To Kate, as the cold bare January days gave place to the early Western spring, and February came in with buttercups and wild iris, Cecilia sometimes could talk, and Kate, brimming with the brother's secrets, was also put in possession of the sister's.

She and Cecilia would occasionally spend one of Kate's free mornings in the Park, walking slowly among the fragrant piny lanes, where the spring sunshine lay so warmly, watching the fog recede toward the ocean, and with their long silences punctuated by the distant booming of the Pacific on the rocks.

Kate knew that the only reason that Cecilia would consider even this much exercise was that Dion Taylor sometimes rode in the Park. But they never chanced to see him, and Cecy, taking the hateful street-car back through the hateful streets, and playing with her luncheon, would drearily arrange to go downtown shopping with her mother, to go to a

movie with her aunt, or to mope about the house entirely alone, with utter indifference.

Tom's confidences were usually made in the late afternoons, or in the evenings, when Kate was on duty in the quiet, shabby library. Kate, busy, capable, practical, made him laugh, his shout ringing like a pistol shot in the silent place. "Ss—sh!" she would warn him, glancing apprehensively at the old men at the newspaper files, anxiously hunting for data, and at the women who mused along the shelves, taking out a book, glancing at a few lines, and thrusting it back again.

If it was evening, Tom usually took her home. Unless Kate were too tired, they walked the short half mile, along crowded Fillmore Street, where movies and candy stores and late groceries were all thronged with cheerful folk. The cousins loitered by windows, bought peanut brittle, found just a few things admirable, and the rest amusing.

They studied the five-and-ten-cent store, with its fluted columns of handkerchiefs and its bright tinware and glittering jewelry; they stopped at the hardware store, and Tom ejaculated at the "peach of a knife" displayed there. They watched the man shaving himself eternally in the druggist's window; the puppies at Robinson's, tumbling about in a wire-grated, sawdusty space; and the linen-coated man who made doughnuts in an enormous vat of black boiling fat, turning them deftly with the tap of a wooden rod. The little restaurants odorous of fried potatoes; the photograph galleries with display cases full of dark, Latin-looking girls in First-Communion dresses; the pathetic little embroidery shops that began and failed and began and failed again so steadily; the fruit shops brilliant with ranked colors, were all fascinating to Tom and Kate.

One night they stopped at a small stationery, framing, and picture shop, in whose window tame little domestic pictures were alternated with bits of molding and a gilded wooden candlestick or two. Through the marked prices, low enough to begin with, conspicuous red ink lines had been drawn; the eighty-nine-cent pictures were all sixty-one cents this week, the three-for-a-dime colored postals were two for a nickel, "this week only." Kate, pitying laughter in her eyes, called Tom's attention to a line of forlorn little paint-boxes, and the hand-lettered sign that said, "Closing Out This Line. While They Last, 15c."

"I love Fillmore Street, and all the people, don't you, Tom?" Kate asked, glancing at him obliquely.

"I love to be here with you. You make anything interesting, Kate," Tom answered. And his smile was a little surprised, as if his own expression had taken him somewhat unaware.

"Look," she said, pointing out a badly colored print, wherein a young man and woman were pictured bending over a sleeping baby. The title was the single word, "Ours."

"A kid is a remarkable thing, when you come to think of it," Tom said, half to himself, struck by the picture, and thinking, with a sudden humming of the senses, of Babette.

"Isn't it?" Kate answered, also in a whisper. And she felt the blood rush to her face with the thought of what it must mean to a woman to bear a child to the man she loves, of what it would mean to have John Kelly's child in her arms, his dark, gravely smiling face close to her own as they looked down upon it.

"Babette idolizes that kid of hers," Tom said, as they walked on. "She says she never could have gotten through without Jean."

"Tom, has your mother the least suspicion in the world?"

"About Babette? My God, no!"

"Don't you think, sometimes," asked Kate, "that you *should* tell her?"

"What for?" Tom asked, after thought, in a troubled voice.

"Well, Mrs Newman has got her divorce, you know."

"Interlocutory," Tom amended.

"What's the difference? I thought you told me that the judge had awarded her her decree in fifteen minutes?"

"Yes, but it doesn't work, really, for a year. December twenty-ninth is the date."

"And then do you really intend to get married, Tom?"

"Oh, my God! Listen to her!"

"Yes, but you've not asked her."

"Yes, but I will. Jean had pneumonia, you know, and Babette took her over to her mother's house last week. No hurry!"

"You think she likes you?"

"I know she does. I know," Tom added, at his grandmother's disgracefully unkempt garden, now, and holding Kate by fingers on her coat sleeve, "I know she's home loving—children loving. All she wants is somebody to be kind to her, music, kids. I'm making good with my father; he told me yesterday that he had never in his life hoped that a son of his could work in so well. I'll be getting seventy-five a week next year, and I suppose the old man will come down with something toward a house, or Mom will—furniture, maybe. They won't like it at first, but after a few years, when my wife and I go on minding our own business and making good, they'll come 'round. Babette'll be free on December twenty-ninth," Tom repeated. "I hope to be married this year."

"Tom, no priest will marry you! To your father and mother it'll never be a marriage, you know."

"I mind that just about as much as *nothing*," Tom stated. "It's nobody's business but mine and Babette's."

"Yes, but will her family like it? Didn't you tell me that her uncle was Rabbi Garberg? How about that?"

"I don't know," Tom said, with a faintly anxious accent on the last word. "Her husband is a sort of relative, lives with an aunt of hers. They're all strong for a reconciliation."

Kate stood silent, her lips pursed lightly as if for whistling, her grave eyes lowered. Presently she shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, come in and see Grandma, Tom. It's only half-past nine. And,

Tom," she added, at the side door, laying her hands on his shoulders as she turned back to face him from the step above, "promise me that you won't purposely deceive Aunt Mollie and Uncle Peter? They think, or at least Cecy says they think, that you and I—you know?"

She had been studying the button her fingers were idly twisting, now she raised her black-fringed eyes, and the moonlight shone in them. The whole shabby neighborhood of sheds and fences was indeed transfigured tonight by the flooding radiance of the spring moon, garbage and barrels and clothes poles threw a romantic lacework of black shadow across the new grass, and the light from the Walshes' kitchen window lay dim and pink across it.

Tom put his arms about her, drew the splendid, springing youth and firmness of her nearer, and she rested quite contentedly against him, her elbows lightly leaning on his shoulders, her hands locked behind his neck.

"Katy dear," the man said, whimsically and tenderly, "why couldn't it have been us?"

"Tommy dear," she answered, brushing the warm smoothness of his bared cheek with her lips, "I don't know."

"Before I went abroad I used to be crazy about you—in that way, you know," Tom said.

"Before you went abroad I think I would have had you, Tom."

"Gosh," murmured Tom, after a moment when they stayed so, locked together, "what a damn shame! You know you are the most beautiful woman in the world, Katy!"

"Not beautiful enough to get what I want," she mused, with a sad smile.

"Who is he, Katy?" Tom asked.

"Nobody!" she answered, with a brief laugh. But the cheek she pressed for a second against his own was wet.

In another moment they were in the stuffy, warm little kitchen, where Maggie and her mother were still talking over the littered table.

The wreckage of an unscientifically compiled dinner for four was strewn about the room, blackened and gummed saucepans heaped in the sink, with the yellowed egg-beater and a strainer through which some substance resembling potato had been partially forced. On the backs of chairs hung dirty towels; soap melted in a dishpan where suds, glasses, baking pans, and papery onion skins mingled indiscriminately, and some liquid that had been spilled or boiled over upon the stove smoked dully through the salt Maggie had conscientiously heaped upon it.

"You're a fine pair of bums," Kate commented, kissing her grandmother, and then her aunt, before sinking into a seat. "You've been sitting here gossiping since six o'clock!"

"Indeed we've not, then," Aunt Maggie assured her. "Mama and I were late with dinner, and didn't we have a little taste of fish hash and fried onions all but ready, when in walks me young men with their

mouths all set for steak. Charley Walsh," his sister added, thoughtfully, "would get up at four o'clock in the morning and you puttin' a steak on the table!"

"There's one, that Charley!—saving your presence—whose stomach will never wish his backbone the top of the mornin', as they'd say at home!" the old woman remarked, with admiring relish. "Your great-uncle Miles, Miles Hagar was his name," she continued, "that merrid a Produstunt that come in later, he was a great eater, too! She had one child they said cud touch fire, and seen the angels that nobody else wud be seein', and him dyin' of a black boil on the day week he'd be four year old——"

Kate and Tom were accustomed to Grandma's rambling reminiscences, indeed they enjoyed them. Kate now reached for a wedge of bakery ginger-cake, buttered it, and began thoughtfully to eat it, her interested eyes upon her grandmother's face. Tom lighted a cigarette.

"Was that the uncle that had the tame goose, Grandma?"

"That was Eugene." Mrs Walsh emphasized the first syllable of the name. "Eugene got the far'rm," she continued. "But di'n't Miles hang onto his own little house, that was over in a corner of it, clost up against the potato patch."

Kate, at this point, always visualized a Western ranch, of some scattered thousands of acres, and her sense of justice rose against her great-uncle Eugene, who could be so selfish and cruel with his brother. The few pitiful Irish acres, with their bog, gnarled apple trees, rooting pigs, and smoking peat roofs, were entirely beyond her imagining.

"Wouldn't you think he could let his own brother have it!" she remarked, indignantly.

"Well, if they di'n't have the whole county up in arms about it!" exclaimed her grandmother. "Sure, there wasn't a young wife, with a child tuggin' on her skirts, that wouldn't heave a peat at Eugene, and she passin' his gate. And what'd me bould young lad Miles do, the day the pollis came up from Coolmulligan," she exulted, "but run out and stop the whole of them that they'd not come near the place. 'Sure me little one-een has the smallpox on me,' he says, an' the officer givin' him the laugh. But have it she did, a light attack, little Moira that afterward become a nun, and off wint me brave officers, and niver a wan of thim stipt near Miles again!"

"Until she got well," finished Kate, neatly piling plates.

"An' not then! For di'n't one of Eugene's children get it very bad, the smallpox, that day week," Mrs Walsh continued her story, triumphantly, "the way he turned black on thim, and di'n't he yell for his cousin, Miles's second child—Clem. 'An' leave me go to him,' Clem says, that wasn't but ten, 'sure no har'rm will come to me whativer!' he says, and down he run to Eugene's, with his mother screechin' like a wild eagle afther him. And di'n't the child get well, and the other cot nothin' off

him," she concluded, obscurely, but in great satisfaction, "and Miles and Eugene the best of frinds from that day on!"

"I see they got their steak," Kate commented in an undertone with a significant glance for Aunt Maggie, as she filled the kettle at the tap.

"Oh, and the time I had getting it, Kate!" Maggie burst out. "I went to Murray's and he was awfully impudent to me; I said I'd let him have something the fifteenth—well, anyway, we'll *pay* him," Maggie said, flushing, "and then that'll be the last he'll ever see of *our* trade! Fifty-one dollars," she added, scornfully, in reference to a long-running bill at the market, "what's that to him? His wife driving a new car three blocks to church, and having it wait for her—doesn't it make you tired! Lizzie Prendergast was in the market—I've got on my best skirt," Maggie diverged to murmur regretfully, "Mama and I were late this afternoon; we were at church." She turned up the garment in question about her hips, and after an unavailing finger search about her person for a pin, picked a wire hairpin from her head, and secured the serge folds with it. "Lizzie Prendergast said, 'Consider the source, Maggie,' " she continued. "Trash, that's what the Murrays are! Well, then Lizzie walked with me to that new market, and I told the feller that we had lived in this neighborhood for forty years, and had always traded at Murray's, but that we weren't satisfied with the quality of his meat—you would have died to hear me! There was an awfully nice young feller there, he looked like one of the Reilly boys, but that wasn't the name he give me," Maggie continued, scraping a pot with a knife edge, "and he says, 'Well, you'll have to see the boss.' By this time Lizzie and me was laughing, and I says, 'Where is the boss?'

"I thought Lizzie Prendergast," added Maggie, "would have a fit. Well, this big feller come out, and I told him about it—and you'd think, the way he treated me, that we done a hundred dollars' worth of business a month!" Maggie interrupted herself to comment with relish, "and he fixed it all up for me, and he says, 'Shall the boy call every morning for the order, Miss Walsh?' 'Oh, no,' I says, Lizzie pinchin' me under my cape, 'that won't be necessary.' And home I come with my steak. And I would have liked to ask Lizzie in to see Mama. She feels so terrible about George being taken right after Ellie, that way. She kind of hinted at it, poor thing," Maggie added, regretfully, "but Charley can't stand her, and he was sort of cross tonight that we were so late about dinner—but then he said this morning he mightn't be here!"

"Yes, how were the boys?" asked Kate, who was accustomed to speak of her uncles under the general term. She was washing plates now, in water so hot that Maggie, with the towel, handled them very gingerly.

"Charley seemed fine, only he was kinder cross," Maggie reported. "Harry had a terrible headache. He says it was something he et at Cullens' the other night."

"And something he drank, too!" Kate added, in good-humored scorn, swashing water. "If he doesn't know what was the matter with him day

before yesterday, when I took his coffee in to him, I do! 'Never again, Kate!' he said to me. Did Uncle Charley give you any of the money from Johnson?"

"He didn't get it. Johnson wasn't there. But Harry thinks there's a good chance for a job with the Golden Gate Tonic Filter Company—the booklet's there, Ma and I were just looking at it. It's a sorter tank, with a gold screen into it—it's a new idea," explained Maggie. "You just drink the water out of this tank, and it'll cure diabetes and I don't know what-all. If Harry gets into it, he says there's a small fortune in it!"

"Oh, for heaven's sakes, let's pray he gets it!" Kate exclaimed, fervently, eternally hopeful, and so radiant, tired and tumbled as she was, as she turned to face Maggie, who was now putting away clean china, that Tom interrupted a low-toned conversation with his grandmother to address her. Her blue eyes shone under the pressed rings of bright hair, there was a flush on the fine, high lines of her cheek-bones; he had come to love the tempered humor and kindness of her mouth.

"What's up, Katy?"

"Oh, just a good job for Uncle Harry—maybe!" she said, laughing. Tom made no comment. But unconsciously his months away from home, and Babette's practical good sense, had altered his viewpoint where his own family was concerned. "Fools!" he thought, of Maggie and Kate.

Babette was exacting, logical, loyal with her own. They must do right by her, and she would do right by them. If she wanted a brother's escort at night, financial assistance from him, or his presence, merely as a male, at a dinner party, she demanded it quite simply. If, on the other hand, these younger brothers asked her to chaperon them and their friends, asked advice as to presents, asked intercession with their parents in some domestic row, then Babette stood their friend loyally and gladly.

Such a thing as championing them through such years as Maggie had known with her brothers, Tom mused, would have never entered Babette's head. She would have been the first to despise herself for such indefensible weakness. To her, brothers were simply humans. To poor Maggie they were that mysteriously sacred thing, the family.

Charley and Harry never contributed anything to their mother's and sister's support; when they had money they spent it upon their own amusements and friends, occasionally bringing home a large steak for Maggie to cook, or presenting their old mother, and thereby flattering and touching her to tears, with a five-dollar box of Townsend's sugared fruits.

"My God, I'd rather have the shoes it would have bought me!" old Mrs Walsh might comment in a regretful aside to Maggie, later. But before the "boys" nothing was ever said except in affection and praise.

The boys staggered in late from alcoholic orgies, slept, muttering and tumbling, for days at a time. Maggie and their mother would creep into the odorous room, sit in mute sympathy and tender pain beside them, stroking the hot foreheads and straightening the tossed bedding.

Presently trays of hot coffee would be eagerly carried in to them. "Not strong enough!" Maggie would whisper, returning to the kitchen; "he feels something terrible. He says he oughtn't to touch the stuff—all he had was two drinks!"

And then Charley and Harry would arise, bathe leisurely in the kitchen, shave, dress accurately, after the wretched days of disarray, of loose silk handkerchiefs substituted for collars and ties of shirt-sleeves and carpet slippers and headaches. Then there must be a real meal: asparagus, steak, chops, French bread, and out would go "me bould young lads," as their mother called them, loftily to search employment, or to collect money, or to investigate the schemes that were sure to net "a small fortune."

If their bed were not made comfortably, they told Maggie about it impatiently. If the meals prepared for them by the women were contemptible in their eyes, they sauntered downtown, or Maggie ran out to replace the stew with broiled meat, and the stale bread with fresh.

"You'd eat fish cakes and loaf ends fast enough if you had a wife and half a dozen children to support!" Maggie, flushed over the broiler, would assure her brothers, without venom. And Charley and Harry, clicking knives and forks while they waited at the table, would recite complacently in chorus:

"No wedding bells for me!"

What there was to praise in them the women of the family incessantly praised. The boys were "as pure as angels. No dirty stories or dirty plays or coarse women in their lives!" "Often Kate'll shock them, reading as careless as she does!" Maggie would tell her associates proudly.

And Charley hadn't had his clothes off for three days and nights when Robbie was dying. This was quoted to Charley's credit even today, fifteen years later. Charley had such a gentle way in a sick-room that many would prefer him to a nurse. And drink, of itself, was no sin, Maggie sometimes told her niece, when Kate grew restive under the constant responsibility and shame of it.

"There's many a good man drinkin'," Maggie argued, "and many another one that's smart, makin' money, and livin' like a lord, without touchin' liquor, that's a devil underneath!"

Mollie, twenty-six years the proud and protected wife of a good man, was much less indulgent with her brothers than her mother and sister were. Indeed, Peter, who never was intemperate in anything, was far kindlier in his attitude toward Charley and Harry Walsh than was his spirited wife. But then Peter Cunningham, gentle, good, generous, always ready to put his hand into his pockets to help out the Walsh family, always ready to give Charley or Harry the letter that might mean one more job, was a saint, was "the salt," as his mother-in-law often shrilly declared.

CHAPTER XII

Tom was seeing Babette at least once, and sometimes twice, a week these days. Kate knew this much, and she conceded in her own surpris heart that Tom had "an awful crush" upon a divorced woman somewh older than he, and a Jewess. But how deeply he felt Kate never dream

Tom did not particularly think of himself in love. He did not, inde analyze the situation at all. He simply knew that in a six-room apartm in Gough Street there lived a dark, quiet, musical woman who was the world to him.

Sometimes, when he was with her, Tom thought about it, with a s of mild amusement. There was nothing sensational about her little p lor, with its pleasant chintzes and its lamplight. There was nothi striking about her tea, her thin bread and butter, her cups. She hers was just a quiet young woman with a pretty trick of smiling as glanced up at him, and a sweet voice that made the songs she sang son how memorable.

Yet all Tom's world revolved about her. When he was not with her, was thinking, calmly and consecutively, of the steps that would take h to her. The cars, hammering by, went up to Babette's neighborhood, a the telephone had become only the medium through which her vo might be brought to him, although as a matter of fact he saw her o at tea times, and at intervals of several days. Tom put her into all books he read, all the plays or moving pictures he saw, followed ot women longingly with his eyes, if by some chance of slender should or prettily set head they reminded him of Babette.

He never went into her little establishment without the old thunder of the heart; or heard the rustle of her frock as she came into the ro without something like an actual vertigo of happiness.

She was lonely, and she consulted him about everything. Having Jea teeth straightened, giving her maid the raise in wages she demanc even the choice of a spring hat, she referred seriously to him. Tom ca to know her very dresses—the plain little velvet one from Paris that her favorite, the dark blue with the strange watermelon sleeves that cost so much, the frilly brown one that she hated. The sweater she knitting for her brother's birthday Tom knew from the first insignific row of single stitches that Babette ripped, and re-knitted, and coun and measured on Tom's own chest, to the final triumphant purl Babette showed him the Italian hand-made handkerchiefs that had only—well, it came out about fifteen cents. She brought him a tall l with so small a foot! The heel had been torn off; there were places wh they mended things like that?

Often they sang together, her clever hands on the keys. She had b expensively educated, spoke four or five languages, and drilled Tom

tiently and soberly on pronunciations. Many of his old songs she thought trash. But his voice had a certain and strange effect on her, and when he was standing behind her singing he loved to see the little shake of her head that meant that her eyes were filled with tears.

One April afternoon, after a walk in the Park, they went into the little Japanese tea garden, and drank the delicious clear bitter tea, and ate the flat little rice cakes. Jean hung breathless over the canal where goldfish swam under lotos leaves, and Tom and Babette could murmur in peace.

Suddenly it was said:

"But how do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"Just what I say. You—you *will* marry me, won't you?"

The woman looked at him from under the beautiful dashing line of her small hat. An enormous saffron rose sprawled close to the dark, rich hair.

"But, Tom—what are we talking about?"

He possessed her small hand, as they sat close together at the long, shelf-like table. He bent nearer her.

"I'm talking about marrying you, dear. I didn't mean to ask you this way. But—but you know that's what I've been thinking of, working for, Babette?"

"But——" she said, slowly, in a troubled voice. She walked away, catching the child's hand, and Tom, trembling, followed her.

They got into the motor in silence, Babette taking the front seat next to him, with Jean in her lap. Tom escorted them to the door of the apartment.

"Babette," he asked, with a dry throat, "may I come up?" Deep in thought, she glanced at him quickly, almost absently.

"Yes. Yes, by all means come up!"

Tom waited for her in the sitting room, his heart beating fast. He felt excited and happy and confused. He did not quite know where his impetuosity was leading him, but there was within him a tremendous confidence that he was equal to his own destiny, whatever it might be.

There was a big black book full of kodak pictures lying on a low table; he had glanced at it before, now he picked it up again and studied it with deep attention.

Pictures of Babette in Europe, as a slim young girl in flaring awkward skirts and preposterously wide hats set upon great puffs of hair. Captions were written in straggling print below the pictures: "Our pension in Nice," "Beggar in the market, Paris."

Some had been written humorously, by the girl of fourteen. But they were not funny now.

Tom found her wedding pictures, was arrested, glowering, by their gaiety and youngness. The bride had been beguiled out of doors by the photographer; she was posed in a flood of summer brightness against trees, rose-bushes, a porch-rail. She was laughing, in a blur of blown

veiling, with the sun full in her eyes. The groom's teeth showed in a wide, silly grin; he was fat, Tom mused darkly.

Babette was a thousand times prettier now—a million times.

He found more pictures of her, furred and youthfully matronly, in a city street with the nurse and the perambulator beside her. Jean was a lump, in a frilled bonnet and caped coat, held up by her proud mother. Later, Jean staggered in a sandbox; Jean walked abroad in tiny gaiters, fur coat and muff; Jean looked through the bars of her crib. "Three weeks and two days old"—"Two years and three months old"—"Four years old," stated the captions.

There was a picnic picture; the men in the women's hats, everyone holding up glasses.

"Common! I don't know why I leave that in there," Babette herself said, coming out in her favorite little velvet frock, to sit beside him on the davenport, and lean against him while she also looked at the pictures. "Those are my aunt's children—that's a girl I knew," she murmured, turning pages. Then, eagerly: "Look, here's Paris——"

Mansarded gray houses, a street ending in plumy chestnut trees.

"Ah, Tom, how I love Paris!" the woman breathed.

"I wonder when we shall see the old place again?" His voice was a little thick; he trembled, but with joy. He need not hurry his hour.

"I shall—next year," Babette said, in a clear little composed voice.

"If I let you——" began Tom, laughing, shaking. He closed the book, and put it back on the table.

Babette, sitting on the low davenport, had stretched her slim legs straight before her, bent her shoulders forward, and locked her hands between her knees. She gave him an oblique look, through half-closed eyes, over her shoulder.

"Oh—*ho?*" she drawled, smiling, and with a rising inflection.

"Oh-*ho,*" Tom answered, deliberately, significantly.

The woman pursed her full red lips, slightly knitted her brows, and looked steadily before her with half-closed eyes.

"Well, what about it?" Tom asked, laughing nervously.

"About what?" she asked, with another glance.

"About *us,*" he persisted.

"Us?" Babette echoed, raising her eyebrows.

"Ah, sweetheart," Tom said, capturing her hand, "don't pretend not to understand."

Babette freed herself, got to her feet and walked to the window. She stood looking out into the muddy gray dusk. A restless, warm spring wind was eddying chaff and papers idly about the street.

Tom stood up and walked over to stand behind her.

"You're such a little thing, Babette," he said, gruffly, whimsically, "I can look right over you!"

She looked up. And Tom felt a little fear, a little chill, strike him. There was entreaty, uneasiness in her look.

"That's the Howard boy, who was so sick, going up the steps, now," she said, indicating the street. "Either the mother or the sister goes to bring him home every night——"

"Babette, were you surprised at what I said in the Park?" Tom murmured, bending to bring his cheek close against hers.

"Yes," she answered, hurriedly and nervously. "But you mustn't!"

"Mustn't what?" he said, fondly, as the quick turn of her head brought her lips almost against his smooth brown cheek.

"You mustn't talk that way, Tom!" she said. And as his frown, his quick color, and the lift of his chin all indicated a protest, she went on quickly, "Please—and you must go now! I can't have it—— I won't have it!" She had walked away, she turned now, and at the sight of his stricken face, at the odd effect he gave of dishevelment, collapse, consternation, she grew impatient. "Please don't distress me—you don't know how I'm situated—*please* go away——"

"I thought you liked me, as I do you," Tom's deep, strangely stirring voice said slowly and simply. A glisten showed on his forehead.

"I do—I do!" Babette protested. "But *please*——"

"Can't I even tell you?" Tom demanded, with a sort of desperate boyish sternness and dignity.

"Oh, Tom, don't be absurd!" She was almost pushing him away. "*Please*—— We're good friends—I like you very much! There, is that enough?"

"No, it's not enough," the man said, steadily, as she paused. He took his hat. "Don't you want me to come back, Babette?" he asked.

"Tom, what a tone to take! Of course I do—after a while!" She was avoiding his eyes, moving lightly about the room. She dragged a light chair into place, lighted a lamp, picked a bit of thread from the floor and twisted it in her fingers. "Good-night," she said, brightly, with an upward innocent glance.

"I want you to marry me," Tom said. She shrugged, tossed her head.

"Oh, nonsense!" she said.

"Do you mean that?" he asked, heavily.

"My dear—I never heard anything so foolish. Of course I mean it!"

"Then I'm not coming back," Tom said, his heart dying within him. He waited. Babette put her thread behind the fire, stood up, sighed, and stared into space. "You don't mean it," Tom said, wretchedly. "You let me think——" He paused.

"I let you think nothing! I certainly have no reason for wanting to get married a second time!" Babette answered, briskly. "Now, go along, like a dear boy, and get rid of any such foolish notion."

She stopped short in the middle of a sentence, trying to carry the matter off lightly, smiling, her head on one side, her eyes looking him straight in the face. Tom stared at her steadily.

Then suddenly he turned, and was gone. The door closed. Babette did

not move a muscle as she heard the elevator clang, heard the sudden roar of his motor-car's engine in the street below.

Tom drove blindly through a gray world—streets, crossings, cars, tracks, houses.

Once he stopped the car carefully at a curb, and sat staring into space.

"So," he said, quite loudly, "that's that?"

After a while he drove on again, entered the big food-scented, luxurious house, mounted to his own room. His mother came padding up to see him there.

"It's you, is it, darling? Let Mama come in. I heard you slam the front door, and I knew it was you. Papa says you had the machine this afternoon. Did you see Kate?"

"Hello, Mary Honoria. No, I missed Kate—she's on duty anyway tonight," Tom answered, kissing her delicately, with a somewhat lathery face. Something terrible had happened. Something terrible had happened. He had been struck, he felt strangely light and confused. "I beg pardon, Mother?" he said. Babette. Babette. Babette.

"Your 'phome," his mother reminded him simply, indicating the telephone. Tom had had an extension put into his room a few weeks before.

"Did it ring?" The blood pounded in his ears.

It was not Babette. Dick Dimond wanted to know if Tom could go out and see the Hanlon girls with him tonight.

"No, no, no, Tommy! You're going with me and the children to the Orpheum," his mother wailed, as Tom dazedly assented. He broke his engagement with young Dimond before it was made, smiled bewilderedly and reassuringly at his mother.

"I'm sorry, Mom. I'd forgotten."

"Tom, you didn't smash your father's beautiful car into anything?" Mollie, puzzled and uneasy at his manner, demanded.

"Didn't what?" Babette was here in the city, there at the end of that telephone line—Babette. Babette. She was angry at him, she had spoken to him frightfully—his head felt dull.

"You've got one of your headaches," said Mollie. "Kate's been mean to 'um," she decided, in her soul.

"I've got a God-damned headache!" he admitted, briefly.

"Tom, don't you know the Second Commandment that says you're not to take the name of the Lord thy God in vain?"

"Excuse me, Mom." He felt frantic, as if he could burst into tears if she stayed there talking any longer. Who was she, the nice stout kindly woman in the blue silk? What were they talking about?

"Your light lights now, Tom," announced Ellen, from the doorway, jerking the chain on the light up and down as she spoke. Ellen was a wiry thirteen now; her young ears stood up prominently.

"Leave that alone!" Tom shouted, glad of an outlet.

"Tom, don't speak to your little sister that way," Mollie directed him, lovingly. "Well, you're the most beautiful child that God ever made,

then," she added, to Paul, who entered in all the splendor of a velvet suit with a lace collar.

"He would be if he hadn't knocked both his front teeth out," Ellen commented, frankly.

"Ellen took my train and she din leave me even blow the fissles, even!" Paul lamented, burying his head upon his mother's shoulder.

"I wouldn't play with your old train, I'm no baby!" Ellen said, with superiority. "It was Annie that gathered it up."

"Well, maybe you're so tired you'd like to leave us go off without you tonight," Mrs Cunningham suggested, adroitly, to her youngest boy. "Maybe that'd be the best way? I'll tell Aunt Allie——"

She looked for sympathy at Tom as she spoke. But Tom was in no mood to extend it, and at Paul's full-lunged shriek he burst into nervous protest.

"My God! Do you suppose about a thousand kids could get out of here, Mom——!"

"Come, children, we'll go downstairs," Mollie said, a little sadly. She loved to have them all around her when she was dressing, but if Tom loved Kate, and they had had a quarrel, you couldn't expect but what the poor boy would be wild.

"Mama," Tom heard Ellen ask interestedly, as the voices vanished down the big stairs, "it's a mortal sin to swear, and if Tom swears, and should drop dead, f'rinstance in his bathtub, you know, the way people do, then he'd die in mortal sin, and if he did *that*——"

A door slammed. Tom, listening, heard nothing further. Suddenly, shaking, he snatched up the telephone book, whirled the pages. A moment later, very quietly, without conscious thought or emotion, he had asked for Babette's number.

Silence. Silence. Then Tom's mother, downstairs, took her receiver from the hook. Tom, upstairs, could hear her say:

"Will you give me the St Francis, please—I disremember the number, it's the newsstand I want, about some theater tickets that was to be left there in the name of Peter Cun——"

Tom softly restored his receiver to its place. He was trembling as he finished dressing. In five minutes he called Babette's number again. No answer. "Your party does not answer," the operator assured him; "do you want me to continue to try to get the number?"

"Yes, please—— No, never mind," Tom said, his heart lead. Desperately he began to plan to see her, at once, tonight. It was only this prospect that made life bearable. Tonight! He had never seen her at night. But tonight he must take himself up to her floor in the little self-operating elevator, ring her bell. The nice French maid would come to the door. "Is Mrs Newman in? Will you ask if I might see her for a moment?"

It was not so much that he wanted to do it, as that under no conditions could he think of doing anything else. Babette possessed him like a flame; he was only dimly conscious of what went on until he should see

her again. To see her, at night, when little Jean was in bed, and the city dark and sleeping——

Seven o'clock. He would get there about eight. What were they doing now? Eating dinner? Certainly, this was dinner.

"Tom, your mother spoke to you."

"I beg your pardon, Mom. I didn't hear you."

"That's all right, darling. How was Kate today?"

"Fine, I guess. Yes, fine."

"You said you didn't see her today!" Ellen shrilled.

"Well, I did." Had he? He rather thought he had not.

"They must have had an awful fight, what on earth about?" Mollie mused. If Kate was being mean to her boy——!

Babette and he had quarreled, Tom thought, confusedly. She had said cruel things to him. What were they? Well, nothing mattered except that he must somehow shake Mom and these insufferable kids, and get to Gough Street—up in the self-operating elevator—ringing the bell——

"Is Mrs Newman in? I wonder if I could speak to her for a moment?"

Then the wait. The wait with his heart hammering—hammering. Then the rustle of her beloved, fragrant gown——

Oh, God, how could he wait for it? Even an hour—half an hour.

He drove the family down Market Street, stopped at the big hotel. Mr Cunningham's tickets? Here they were. Tom took one out of the little envelope before rejoining the family.

"Mama, I have my ticket, in case I have trouble finding a decent place to park the car. You go in to the theater, and I'll join you as soon as I can. The kids don't want to miss the animal number!"

"You're a dear good brother, the way you're always thinking about them, Tom!" Mollie said, with a little grateful rub of her shoulder against his before she got out.

He was alone. He was flying through the dark streets with a heart full to pain of hope and joy. Van Ness. Franklin. Gough.

The car was parked across the street. Tom entered the apartment house dizzily, mounted to Babette's floor. What he was going to say he did not know; it was enough that he was here.

He heard the bell ring. Silence. Then finally the Frenchwoman peering out of darkness.

"Is Mrs Newman here? Would you ask her——"

"She went to her mother, in the country," the woman said, in French. The whole world turned black. Black.

"Oh, I see. I see. Well, thank you. Thank you. I was wondering if I left a paper today——?"

"Would you like to come in and look?" She had lighted the hall. She was gathering some informal garment about her as she scudded back through the dining room's swinging door. Tom made a blind and wretched pretense at hunting.

He went out into the dark a few minutes later dazed and sick. To-

morrow sounded to Tom a year away. Mollie, when he stumbled in beside her in the dark theater, put a plump loving hand on his.

"Did you have to go far, lovey?"

"Far?" He could telephone Ross Valley tomorrow, perhaps cross with her on the boat——

"To park the car, dear?"

"Oh. Oh, yes! Well, no, right here in Mason Street. Not far, right up the street."

"All you missed was two men that came on," Ellen supplied in a sharp whisper, shaken with amusement, "and one, that had a great big fat face, had on a little teenty hat, and the other had a thin face—didn't he, Mom? —and his hat——"

The most exquisite hour in Tom's life came two days later, when Babette came back from the country, and in answer to his telephoned appeal, consented to see him.

They had tea, late in a soft, sunless afternoon when the gray streets stirred and loomed with noiselessly crowding fog. Tom's big hand shook as he took his cup; even Babette's quiet, self-possessed manner was replaced by a mood oddly girlish, oddly unformed today.

It was agreed. There was to be no more talk of love, not for months —years. And they were to be friends. They were to see each other once a week, and everything was to be as it had been. Their hands, their eyes, their confident smiles, met upon the little compact.

Tom was broken. He felt as if he had weathered a devastating illness. Gratefully, humbly, he took the crumbs that fell from her generous little hand. He left her, went home, dazed and purified with great and holy joy. He would be worthy of her trust. He would not fail her—little Babette!

Shyly, and with a deeply augmented appreciation and delight on both sides, the tea-hours, the confidences, recommenced. Books were exchanged again; once or twice Babette telephoned Tom, when she was shopping downtown, and they lunched together. They sat long at the table, and if the phrases they exchanged so earnestly were not lovers' words, at least these hours were the most vital, the most burning with interest, in both their lives.

When they sang together, Babette sometimes laid her little soft brown hand upon Tom's shoulder, as she stood behind him. He thought that she did not know she did it, but she was quite conscious of what she did. His cleanness, his Irish freshness and purity and buoyancy had a strange fascination for her. There was nothing calculating or material about him. Babette liked to be near him.

Both Babette and Tom saw other persons continually, their mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. But the only hours during which they seemed to live were the hours they spent together. When she was with her practical, somewhat selfish family, Babette's lips and eyes often wore a dreamy smile nowadays. Tom, away from her, had a fashion of falling

into deeply abstracted moods; his mother noticed it, and despaired. Was the family boring to Tom, after Paris?

"Why don't you want to take Cecy to the Prendergasts' party, dear?" Mollie might ask, anxiously.

"All you have to do is say the word, Mom!"

"Yes, I know, dear. But you said it would be stupid."

"Stupid! Gosh, it'll be the extension of the legal limit!"

"You used to like the Prendergasts, Tom."

"Never! A lot of bird-brains that sit around playing Five Hundred, or dancing to the Victrola. I'd rather be shot."

Mollie, instinctively fearful, would sigh deeply. It seemed impossible to satisfy a growing son with home ties. If he'd only marry Kate, a dear, sweet, pure good girl, what a relief it would be!

CHAPTER XIII

In July Mollie and the younger Cunninghams always went up to the log cabins that were part of a loosely constructed hotel system on Lake Tahoe. This year Kate's branch of the Library was being reconstructed, and Kate was offered a six weeks' vacation on half pay. The alternative was substitute service in a dozen library branches all over the city, and it was Mollie who affectionately suggested that the girl take the welcome leisure and accompany the family to "Camp."

"I don't know why you're so good to me, Aunt Mollie," said Kate gratefully, when Mollie, as Kate's check was given as a matter of course to Maggie, for household expenses, replenished the girl's wardrobe at her own expense.

Mollie knew, however, and she felt a trifle guilty. It was partly of course because Robbie's Catherine was such a dear, good patient child, and had worked for two years without a holiday. But it was also because Mollie and Peter firmly believed that a secret engagement, or at least an understanding, existed between Kate and Tom. And it was also because poor, dreary little Cecy seemed to depend upon Kate more than anybody else in the world; Kate would stir her up, keep her busy, distract her.

So Mollie and Kate went shopping, on a dreamy, warm Saturday morning in late June, and Kate came back to the Cunninghams' to lunch, ecstatic with excitement. Aunt Mollie had bought her a dress of handkerchief linen piped with blue, two ginghams, one green and one pink, two pairs of white shoes, and a spotted yellow and black calico.

"The caliker looks like a nigger dress, but that's the one she would have," Mollie said, indulgently, in the big cool dining room, serving fricasseed chicken generously, comfortably warm and wearied after the busy morning, and enjoying the rôle of benefactress. "It was only four fifty. You'd wonder how they done it. Where's Baby? And where's Cecy?"

"Cecy went down to Chinatown, and Baby's over to Mullinses'—you said yourself he could go, Mollie," Allie said. "Baked potato, Kate?"

Kate was enjoying that delicious sense of unreality that the unexpected holiday gives. The morning of shopping, the free noon hour, and the prospect of an afternoon, evening, another whole free day and another and another—it was almost too sweet to be true! Six weeks of them ahead! And not all to be spent in the dingy cottage in Turk Street, either. Most of them up in the sweet piny freedom and silence of the camp, with the squawk of a jay and the splash of a big fish in the lake the only sounds of the heavenly blue mornings.

And added to all this, the handkerchief linen, the two ginghams, and the "nigger" calico. There was not a cloud in Kate's sky. All the dreary, drudging years, the sordidness and self-denial and deprivation had rolled away, had left her untouched; she had entered into this happy interval with the zest of a child.

Tom came in for lunch, looking thin and somewhat tired; "but that's the warmth of this spring heat on him," diagnosed his mother fondly and anxiously. She watched him come behind Kate's chair, catch her hand, and bend over the girl's exquisite raised face to kiss it, as naturally as he performed the same little ceremony of love with his mother.

"Them two!" Mollie thought. "You couldn't look at them and not know the whole of it!" mused Allie. And the glances of mother and aunt met in a deeply satisfied smile.

Tom wanted to know if Kate and Cecy would like to go to a picture tonight; John Kelly had suggested it. The idea was that the four of them go to dinner at New Frank's, and then take in a show. John and Cecy! Mollie's and Allie's eyes met triumphantly again. Everything was working out perfectly.

Kate managed to answer casually that she would love it, but she felt that with much more felicity her heart would burst. The big, pleasantly shaded room, the delicious food, the atmosphere of love and harmony, plans, freedom, new clothes——

Cecy came in, looking a little pale from the heat, and apologetic. She kissed her mother, slipped into her seat. There was a bloom, a radiance, a youthful appetite and zest once again apparent upon her; it became obvious that something pleasant had happened to her.

"Mama, what do you know about this? I met Dion in Sing Fat's."

Glances flew about the table, but Cecy was eating busily.

"Well, did you ever, dear," Mollie commented, mildly.

"He was getting a gong—what on earth he wants with a gong, goodness knows!" Cecy went on, merrily casual, and busy with her food. "And of course I was getting the lanterns for camp! I heard his voice saying, 'Don't trust that woman, John, her heap no good!' You can imagine how I felt! The Chinaman looked perfectly stupefied! So then we went around together, and he got me ginger, and he got you an idol, Ellen, it's out there in the hall, and we laughed so I thought we'd be

arrested! He bought me a box, and I bought him a little china ship. He said we spent three dollars and used up seventeen dollars' worth of their time!"

She was so happy! She was the glowing, rosy, curly-headed Cecy of the shining blue eyes and the golden freckles once more. To everyone at the table there came a little emotion of sympathy and pleasure, and the conversation went on in a gale of pleasure and felicity.

"Dion came into Saint Mary's with me, I didn't ask him to," Cecy presently added. "I said that we usually went in, while we were waiting for the car, and he said he'd like to. He knelt down and everything, on one knee, you know, the way Protestants do? He goes to Los Angeles again next week, and I told him we were going to the Lake, bag and baggage, on Wednesday. But he said he'd surely be up at Tahoe, sooner or later, and I asked him to visit us. Was that all right, Mama?"

"Fine, lovey." And Mollie looked about the board, and wished that Papa had chanced to come home to lunch today. The children and life, and all her plans and hopes for both, hadn't seemed to be so happy for a long, long time. Baby wasn't here, of course. Paul was nine now, and growing far too independent.

"Where's Baby?" someone suddenly asked, meeting her thoughts.

"Over to Mullinses'; I guess he's having his dinner there," Mollie answered, a little worried. "Go 'phome, Mart," she commanded, "and ask will Kane stop for him to bring him home later on?"

Kate burst into the story of the four gowns, the delightful plans for the evening. Mollie asked her eldest son in an undertone if he could take Ellen and Paul out to the Park with Lizzie, just drop them there?

"I've a date, but not until four," Tom answered, obligingly. His heart entered the apartment house on Gough Street, mounted in the elevator, rang a bell. "Mrs Newman, Germaine?"

"Leave me take 'em, Mom," Martin said, returning to his chair, upsetting Paul's untouched glass of milk, which Annie, with a mild elevation of her eyebrows, began to mop up at once in an entirely accustomed manner, kicking Cecy in the shin, and catching his big knee on the tablecloth. "I could run the car. Harry Dimond——"

"What did they say about Paul?" Allie demanded. "Don't eat that baked potato skin, Ellen. They say—savin' your presence, Mollie—it scrapes the intestines, and many a one'll die of some disease like Bright's——"

"Oh, they said Paul started home half an hour ago, by himself," Martin reported, with a suddenly revived interest, "he said that Mom would let him. Mrs Mullins said please to 'phone——"

"O blessed Jesus and the everlasting saints!" Mollie whispered, her full ruddy face turning ashen. "Tom—Tom—half an hour—and it's only three blocks to Mullinses'——!"

And then what? It all happened at once, and hundreds of times as all those present were destined to review what followed, they would always

linger upon this terrible moment of coincidence: the quick alarm about Paul, the reverberating and quickly repeated ring at the front-door bell, their concerted and terrified rush to the hall, and then from Allie, who was in the lead, a long fearful wail as it opened.

"Don't frighten his mother—all right, now, don't be scared——" There were fifty craning and crowding persons on the steps, at least half as many voices spoke together. "He got knocked down—he's all right, now——" A big policeman in the lead, something limp and small dangling in his arms—a little, little boy, with blood drying across his ashen, unconscious face, and blood matted wet in the golden hair at his temples that had not yet lost their baby curl.

Then Mollie's piercing scream, and the crowd on the steps got what it had come for, the sight of the child's poor mother straining, sobbing, running from the group in the hall, shrieking:

"Oh, my God! Oh, God, have mercy! Oh, my child, my baby!"

Mart was holding her, his schoolboy face glistening with tears; Kate was holding her, white-faced, and with great terrified eyes on the crowd at the door. Ellen was screaming, Cecy sobbing and praying: "Oh, God, save my little brother; oh, God, save my little brother; oh, Mama—Mama—*don't!*"

Tom helped the policeman with Paul's limp body; the door was slammed in fifty hungry faces by an hysterical maid, the cortège was moving upstairs. Mollie had fainted, at the foot, and servants usually unseen in this neighborhood, mysteriously appearing from the lower regions, were caring for her, with loud prayers and cries.

Allie had preceded them upstairs, Paul's big bed was turned down.

"You'd better wash him off, and get him undressed," the policeman—tenderly lowering the dusty little boots as Tom tenderly lowered the bloody head—said in an undertone, to Tom.

"Don't touch him," Allie said, firmly and quietly, at their elbows. "The doctor'll be here in a second; he's on his way now. I've just had him on the 'phome. Get a lot of hot water, Ida," she added, to a maid, "and ask Gertie for them old sheets I tore into squares awhile back. Be quiet, Cecy, and act like Ellen here does," she added, to the noisily sobbing Cecy, whose teeth were chattering. Cecy, awed, fell silent, and Ellen looked erect and proud despite her pallor and wet eyes. "That's it, Mart, you've got the right idea," Allie, easily in command, and quite calm, added to Martin, who had buried his untidy boy's head in his big, red, warty hands, and was kneeling and murmuring wild, blind Hail Marys at the foot of the bed. "O'ny God can help the little feller now."

The girls fell on their knees, joined with shaking whispers in their brother's prayers. Tom, to whose hand Paul's unconscious little crushed hand loosely clung, gave his aunt one look. But it was a look of such passionate and grateful admiration as many a professional beauty never wins in a long life. And perhaps in such a look the patient, humble, slaving Allies of the world balance the scales.

"You're the wonder of the world!" Tom said. Allie said in a whisper: "Go after that copper, Tom, and give him a twenty, and get his name and number. There's money in my black bag, in my handkerchief drawer."

Tom slipped away, just as Mollie, supported by two maids, came slowly in. She had a folded handkerchief in her plump hand, with which now and then she absently touched her swollen lips. Her face was oddly wet, as if the maids had dashed water into it, and her damp plain hair, pushed carelessly back, gave her an old look.

The praying children eyed her without interrupting their soft, frightened whispers, as she approached the bed. She stood looking down upon the unconscious child, the dusty shoes, the blood-soaked curls. A sob swelled slowly within her, and broke in a bitter ripple that shook her breast cruelly, and tore at her set lips with a whining sort of cry: "ooo ——ooo——ooo!"

"Now, Mollie——" Allie warned her.

Mollie moved heavy eyes to her sister-in-law's face.

"The doctor?" she whispered, wiping her wet, swollen lips again. "Peter?"

"I telephoned Pop," Martin murmured, returned from the hall. Immediately afterward the doctor, shocked and efficient, was in the room. The strange day dragged on. Aunt Maggie was there, the little old grandmother was there, weeping. Peter, pale under his full healthy cheeks, was frequently to be found sitting beside the bed where Mollie lay, stretched desolate, stimulated with her first hypodermic, mentioning "digitalis," a new word, when Allie or Maggie or her mother came in to whisper beside her.

A quiet priest came in, calling Peter by his name, and speaking of Tom affectionately as "my godson." He knelt beside little Paul, so strangely tiny and bandaged and motionless now, and as they all knelt, praying, their eyes sought his face anxiously for comfort.

A nurse, as naturally Aunt Allie's enemy as is the hawk the hare's, was installed. Cecy was with her father and Ellen in the sitting room a good deal of the time; Peter seemed glad to have his girls with him. Each took an arm of his big chair, and as he embraced them, he leaned his tired forehead against one slender little body and then the other, and they talked of Paul. Of what the baby had meant to Mommy and him, after little Daisy died, and of what a cunning baby Paul had been. Kate was everywhere, helpful, brave, loving, efficient, calm.

"She's like a sister to them all already," Peter told the priest, "and as dear as any one of them to the poor mother and me. Her and Tom, there——"

"Well, it's only half a cousinship," the other returned, eyeing the two young persons thoughtfully, as they conferred with serious faces in an angle of the downstairs hall. "That might be a very happy thing for you all."

It was Kate who brought Peter a cup of hot tea, at five o'clock, and firmly and coaxingly saw that he drank it; Kate who suggested cheerfully that since Aunt Mollie was going to worry herself sick anyway, she would be no worse in a big chair in Paul's room, where she could watch him; and it was Kate who fought the latter point with the nurse, and won.

Miss Singleton thought it would be much better to have the little boy's mother in another room.

"She's worrying about him," Kate explained, superintending Tom, as he moved pillows and stools.

"Then she'd very much better not be near him—he's a very sick little boy," Miss Singleton suggested, pleasantly and firmly.

"Then she'll simply make herself worse," Kate countered, more pleasantly and more firmly.

"Doctor, this wasn't my idea——" the nurse murmured, when the doctor came back with a colleague, at six, to find Mollie pale, tragic, unspeakably fearful, propped up in pillows, and moving her fingers from bead to bead of her rosary, only a few feet away from Paul's bed.

"That's all right," said the doctor, with a brief nod. And from the second that was reported, everyone in the house loved the doctor, with laughter and tears, and felt that the nurse had been very neatly scored.

The new doctor eyed Paul thoughtfully.

"I think I wouldn't disturb him," he decided, with a quiet nod. He touched the bandages, feeling bones and muscles gently, and Mollie could have shrieked. He sat down, laid clever fingers upon the little white-wrapped hand. "Well, I guess you've had a pretty rough time of it, little boy," he said, kindly.

He took a chair beside the bed. Minutes went by.

"H'm!" said the new doctor then, getting up.

That was all. Downstairs they all gathered about him, and told him about it: the child had crossed in mid-street, run out from between two parked cars—it was nobody's fault—it was nobody's fault—the darling, the *darling,* he was just running home for his lunch! They were all in tears again.

"And what do you think, Doctor?" It was Peter, hoarse, awkward, pale.

"We-el, there's a good pulse there."

"Never had a sick day in his life!" Allie, red-eyed, combative, her arms crossed firmly on her lean breast, said with a snap. The doctor moved his eyes to hers speculatively.

"He has a chance, Mr Cunningham. A fighting chance. Impossible to say now what the shock has been. There may be a spinal fracture. We dare not move him just now."

"It'll kill his mother—he bein' the baby, as you might say," Peter faltered, his reddened, shrewd, tear-wet eyes searching the other man's face for a glimmer of hope.

"We'd like to get an X-ray, of course," said the doctor, thoughtfully, "but there's the danger of moving him just now."

Tom, feeling himself contemptible, had just returned from a low-toned telephone conversation with Babette, in his own room. He put a bracing big arm about his father's shoulders, and they faced the doctor together. Peter seemed strangely small, sunken, and old.

"There's no hope—they think he'll go in the night!" Kate, sobbing, told John Kelly, when John called, horrified and amazed, at eight o'clock. Cecy sobbed, clung to her cousin. Tom, looking white and disheveled, came out to take charge of John.

"Go in and talk to my father, John, just to distract him, I'm going up to my mother," he said.

Yet this was Saturday night, and on Sunday night at the same time Paul opened big shadowed eyes, and looked straight into the eyes of his father, kneeling beside him, and Peter, kissing his little helpless hand, whispered, "God love my laddie-buck! He's goin' to pull through for his old daddy's sake!"

After that Peter always came into Paul's room in the mornings, to ask the flat little wreck of babyhood in the bed: "Who you goin' to pull through for?" And Paul's lips always smiled, and he answered, "Yo-o-o-u!" And after a few days, only they seemed months to the watching family, Peter added, "And what do you want Mr Emporium to go home and tell Mrs Emporium that the little Cunningham boy got today?" and Paul would say, in a reedy little voice that grew stronger and stronger daily, "Blocks!" or "Ozma of Oz!"

They were only three weeks late in starting for camp, after all. The doctors agreed that that was the place for the child, after the operation, to build him up and keep him quiet, and Mollie, grayer, thinner, with a haunted look in her gentle eyes, was glad to get away.

He might walk again, on crutches, jerk that injured spine of his about, it was extremely probable that he would. And the fingers, the four firm little babyish dirty fingers that she and Allie had kissed every time they washed them with a damp rag, were gone from the left hand. Thank God, said the sisters and aunts, it wasn't the right! Thank God the child was alive! Thank God it wasn't the brain! Thank God he didn't suffer, after the first feverish, uncomfortable days of anæsthetics and readjustments.

But Mollie couldn't thank God for anything. She was crushed, silenced, dazed by the blow. Her baby mutilated, pitied, limping, handicapped at the very start! What sorrow ever borne was like unto this sorrow of hers?

Cecy and her love affair, Tom's going abroad—but they were so well, so strong, so complete through these crises! Daisy, exquisitely dying at three—yes, but that wasn't a living horror like this. Before he ever knew that he was mortally crippled, the precious, perfect body of the baby was laid low. Saying as they did over and over that Kate was an angel, and Tom the prop and stay of them all, and that Peter had aged twenty years,

the women of the family agreed that "it'd all but kill poor Mollie on them!"

After all, it was Martin who came in for the most surprising praises, when they sadly, and incessantly, in low tones, talked about it all. Martin, up to now a mere awkward responsibility, a clumsy great overgrown animal who teased his sisters and whose repentance and better moods were as annoying and disastrous to household comfort as his accidents and mischief, Martin had been oddly matured by his little brother's catastrophe.

They had all, astonished, watched his gentleness, witnessed his resourcefulness, his capability. It was Martin who invariably suggested what Paul wanted when the hurt little mouth was too thick for speech.

"He'd take orange juice," Martin would suggest, watching him. "I bet he'd like some ice to suck. I bet he'd like apple-sauce, hearing you all talk about it, wouldn't you, Baby?"

And as the injured child would nod faintly, Cecy or Allie or Kate would fly trembling to the telephone: "Doctor, could he have a taste of apple-sauce? He says he'd like it!"

Martin could always make him laugh, even if it were no more than at Martin's own dirty thumb that he walked over counterpane and pillows, as a mannikin.

"Here's Holy Joe," Martin would announce, as the thumb peeped out of hiding. And Paul's weary eyes would brighten and his sore little mouth twitch. Even when Martin sprawled his ungainly and giant length upon the bed, he never seemed to hurt his brother. "Holy Joe," little Paul would plead, at the end of the long, weary day. And Kate would think Martin actually inspired as he announced:

"Holy Joe's mother gave him a licking this morning for going out in the streets without his pants on. He's going to get into the dairy before his mother comes in with the milk tonight—here she is, carrying the pans along, and not seeing him—and boong! whoopety-whoop goes the milk!"

"Is that the baby laughin'?" Peter would ask, astonished, in the hall. Mollie, always before this undemonstrative with Mart, often kissed her second son, nowadays, as she passed him, and Kate was so charming with him, and so appreciative, that Martin got his first violent touch of secret passion for this beautiful older cousin. Kate got a doll two inches long, in the Chinese quarter, a strange wild-headed little creature of wire and plaster, and this became "Holy Joe."

Presently Holy Joe had a bear, on a real chain, and having a magic carpet that conveyed him out of any trouble, to the ecstatic and triumphant shouting of Paul, he survived a series of blood-curdling adventures. As soon as Martin came into the house, Paul's imperative, joyous little voice could be heard calling, "Holy Joe, Mart! Mar-r-t! Holy Joe!"

And Mart would fly upstairs, snatch an apple whose noisy consumption commonly punctuated Holy Joe's history, and wheel to Paul's bed the table that contained the blocks, trains, tin soldiers, and toy ships that were all opposed solidly to Holy Joe.

The summer camp was upon the steep, piny slopes of a blue deep lake; there was a pebbly beach, and near it a cooking fire place made of rounded stones and a long pine table under great trees on the shore. Behind these were the cottages, two- and three-room unplastered shelters with porches railed with slim redwoods still wearing their plushy bark. The big hotel, where the family usually dined every night, was three miles away.

Hitherto Mollie and Peter had merely rented two of the four or five cabins, trusting to chance that their neighbors would be congenial. But this year they took all the cabins, bringing two of their own maids to the camp for the first time, and a Chinese cook. This was to be no casual holiday of a few weeks, the camp was a retreat this year, and the months of resting and fresh air were to save Paul, and perhaps his mother as well. A tutor was to come daily to coach Martin, who would enter college in the fall, in Latin and mathematics, and when school opened Ellen was to go back as a boarder. But Allie, Mollie, and the precious invalid would remain in the health-giving mountains until the coming of cold weather. Mollie said that she never wanted to see the city again!

To bird-calls and mysterious splashes in the lake they all awakened at about eight o'clock, and Kate and Ellen and Mart always made a rush for the cold water, screaming and swimming noisily for a short five minutes. Then, chattering and shuddering, they breakfasted under the trees, with the satin stretch of the water spread before them, reaching unbroken to the steep opposite shores that were so thickly clothed with rising files of pines.

Paul was carried down to this meal, and usually afterward Ellen and he had their blocks, and "Lotto" and "Parchesi," and the odorous plastic clay, and the kindergarten needles and wool, and all the rest of their paraphernalia out, to spread upon the plain pine boards.

Meanwhile Cecy and Kate whirled through bed-making; stopped to gossip with Mart, who was raking, or chopping wood; gathered flowers for the table and the bedrooms; brushed leaves and threads from the clean pine floors; talking, laughing at the Chinese; falling into long reminiscent conversations with Mollie and Allie, dusters in hand.

Then they would all gather at the table; Mollie would take Paul's cramped little body into her big arms, now, and the talk went on, to an accompaniment of pea-shelling or of darning.

"What time do Uncle Peter and Tom get here?"

"Gracious goodness, that's true! It's Friday again. Did you make Tom's bed? I guess they'll be up on the supper bus."

"Mom, if the fish boy comes, do you want trout again?"

"Cecy, next time Tom and John are here, let's really do what we always say we're going to do—row across there and climb up to that peak? We'll take some sandwiches—will you do it, Mart?"

"Sure, I'll do it! Only you'll have to have a pruning saw or a brush hook or something. Sure, let's do it."

"Why don't you girls take the boat now and go for a good row? It's goin' to be awful hot later on. Two years ago that poor woman had a sunstroke——"

"Well, those girls down at the hotel sort of half suggested that we come down for some tennis. Did you clean the car, Mart? Feel like it, Cecy?"

"Don't scrape the back of your heels together like that, Mart. No wonder your stockin's always look——"

"Look, Mom! That was a great *big* boy! Look, where the water's all ripply! Gee, he was a *monster*——"

"Your aunt was speakin' to you, Martin."

"I wasn't sayin' nothin' to him, Mollie. It was only about his socks, and God knows he don't wear them out the way Tom does."

And so on and on, through the sweet-scented, warm, idle hours, while the sun grew stronger and stronger, dazzling on the lake, and the resinous scent of the pines drifted on the still air. The man with the berries rattled in, in a dirty surrey, and the fish boy came, draped in the stiffening silver scales of his prey, and the odors from Wong's kitchen, boiling peaches and asparagus, sweet baking bread, grew more and more appealing.

Mollie never spoke, the whole summer long, without a sharp preliminary sigh, but to all the others, Paul included, these were happy days. Cecy had a new friend, a Miss Ethel Merry, who was one of Dion Taylor's own particular set, in Burlingame, and twice during the summer Cecy packed a suitcase daintily, and went radiantly off to spend a week-end with Ethel. The first was not quite perfect, because Dion was in the South, playing golf in a tournament, but from the second visit Cecy returned ecstatic, exhausted with felicity. It had all been so amusing, and so glorious, and Dion had been so funny—she quoted the things Dion had said, for days. The country club, and dancing, and her first polo game had intoxicated Cecy; she wanted to do some "nice little thing" for Ethel, who was rich, and older than she, and so terribly kind to her.

"This Miss Merry's mother, is she nice?" Mollie asked.

"Oh, she's away, Mama. She's getting a divorce! She's going to marry a man from New York."

"Oh-h-h?" Peter asked, from the head of the table. And Mollie wished devoutly that she had not started the topic. "Where's the father?" Peter went on, slowly. "How did Cecy meet this young lady, Mama?" he added.

"Why, we met her a long while back," Mollie explained somewhat haltingly. "An' then she come up here to the hotel for a dance last month."

"Well, I don't know as I'd encourage——" Peter began, mildly, and stopped. Kate and Cecy exchanged a reassuring glance. Ethel was going East next week anyway; Peter's disapproval had been expressed just a trifle late.

Ethel, however, as far as Cecy's secret hopes were concerned, had served her turn. Dion had seen Cecy, pretty and gay, flitting about among the beautiful lawns and gardens of his own sacred environment, and

Dion had so far renewed his attentions as to send Cecy a telegram, early in August, to the effect that he was coming up to see her.

This threw Cecilia into a momentary flutter of ecstasy, but immediately she turned from a pretty, spontaneous, unself-conscious girl into a wretchedly fretting old woman for ten burning days. A touch of poison-oak on her shoulder distressed her beyond measure, she slept badly for several nights, and was all nerves, the fear that strawberries would not be procurable, and the cook give them his tiresome old ice-cream instead of his really unusual strawberry shortcake, and finally, the mischance that two of the best dancing men left the hotel the day before Dion came, all caused her anxious impatience.

She said she looked a fright, and she really did look something much less than her usual pretty self. She fought her mother and father to tears upon the point of their dining at the hotel on Saturday night, or just having their usual home dinner beside the lake, with a later attendance at the dance. Any talk of being chaperoned threw her into a rage.

The actual week-end, when Dion talked of other girls, and Cecilia was wearied and excited, was a failure. But it was pleasant to remember, to add to that growing score of small proofs that Cecilia really counted in his life.

John came up almost every week-end. Kate would see the car roll in, see the squarely built figure get out on one side as Uncle Peter tumbled out the other, see the men reach for suitcases and boxes of candy and magazines.

No need for her to hurry, worry, rage. It was Friday afternoon again, with soft twilight creeping across the peaceful surface of the blue lake and insects humming and whirling in the long shafts that fell through the feathery redwood boughs. Opposite the camp, the rising files of redwood spires caught the last golden banners of sunshine, the warm still air was scented with pine resin, and with the good smell of Wong's finger rolls baking. Far below them, in the valley, the night was mysteriously gathering, in streamers of violet gauze.

"Hello, Kate."

"Hello, John. Hot in the city?"

"Freezing. Fog and wind. But it was hot in the train. I think I'll go in swimming."

That, or something as unimportant, was all. Yet, as John turned up toward the guest-cabin, for his bathing-suit, Kate might rest her bright head against a velvety red tree-trunk, rising like a great mast a hundred feet above her, and close her eyes, and breathe deep in a very suffocation of bliss.

John saw Kate beloved, followed, indispensable, heard her praised, heard Tom's "When can I see you a sec, Kate?" and Cecy's "Kate, read that, and see if you think it's all right." He knew that Paul's little three-cornered white face brightened when she came in; he knew what Peter

and Mollie thought of her, he saw her seized at the dances by a score of young men whose very names he did not know.

And Kate knew that all this was incessantly before his eyes, and that she had only to bide her time. Joyous, friendly, exquisite in the "nigger" calico or the handkerchief linen, she slipped into her place beside him, at the happy meals beside the lake, smiled into his eyes as she asked him questions, fell into deep conversations with him and Cecy and Tom, while the light dropped, and lingered, and was gone, and when lamps bloomed in the raw little cabins, and Peter snored peacefully in his long reading chair.

Night noises in the great woods that were shutting down behind them, blacker and blacker; they would hear the crack of a dry branch, the creaking hoot of an owl, the squawk of an awakened bird. The girls reached for sweaters. And from the broad lake that was like a pool of ink, a regular soft rippling wash, and sometimes the put-put-put and moving, insignificant light of a motor-boat.

"If you love a man, nothing else matters!" This from Cecy.

"Oh, Cecy—respect and companionship!" Kate would say.

"Oh, nonsense, Kate! Those things aren't *love*."

"I think they are. Don't you, John?"

"Well, it seems to me they're important——" John's voice would say, slowly.

"Nix." This was Tom. "Love's something else again. You lose sight of companionship and logic, and whether your family'll like it——"

"Exactly!" Cecy would agree, triumphantly. "You kind of go—crazy!"

"You could love a man, respect him, long to be near him, to raise children, to spend the rest of your life with him," Kate's beautiful voice would say steadily, "without that crazy, wild-eyed, jealous, frantic feeling!"

"Shows how much you know about it, Catherine dear! You've never been in love."

"I *have* been in love!"

"Ah—no—no—no!" And Cecy's voice would hold a ring of longing and pain. She had suffered, she was not happy now, but she knew what love was!

And then the yellow summer moon would rise, clear and full, behind the pines, and streaks of liquid silver would pierce the branches above them, and turn the woods to magic, and strike a twinkling path straight to the lifted furry tops of the trees across the lake. All the feathery underbranches of the redwoods would be aureoled with the unearthly brilliance, blots of inky shadows everywhere. And the young persons would rise, to shout rapturously, "Come out, Mom! Uncle Peter, do just wake up to *look* at this moon!"

And presently they would all be out on the lake, catching up glittering handfuls of the icy water splashed with light, and singing all the songs they knew.

So all the little boats come sailing home across the sea——

"God send their boats safely home, them four!" Peter would say, hearing them as he undressed.

But Mollie could make no cheerful answer now. Let Kate and Tom and Jawn and Cecy do what they would! Nothing would give her back that dreaming May morning when little Paul had asked so importantly: "Kin I go over to Bernard Mullins's?"

If she had sent Kane for him—if she and Kate, coming home triumphantly from their shopping, had but stopped for him! If Lizzie had but reminded her, if Allie——

Cecy back from Chinatown, Tom and Kate gossiping, herself helping fricasseed chicken, so glad to be fed, seated, and back in her own big quiet house again. And, at that very instant, the child running out of the Mullinses' gate, whole and sound and firm upon his square little legs—and never to be whole and sound and square in life again!

"It would be easier if they'd kilt him on me," she sometimes said, quietly, lifelessly, with watering eyes, to Allie or Maggie.

"Oh, Mollie, don't say that, dear! The Lord has His own good reasons for sendin' triles to this one and that!"

CHAPTER XIV

One heavenly august sunday, of fragrant pine needles and steadily shining sun, Kate and John found themselves scrambling down a mountain trail, somewhat in the rear of Cecy, Peter, Mart, Tom, Ellen, and some other young persons who had joined them for a hard Sunday walk.

They had had luncheon high up in the mountains, beside an icy spring, Kate capably engineering the little coffee grill, Tom producing the bottle of cream from a side pocket, the other girls snapping the strings of sandwich boxes and licking their fingers free of the too-soft cake frosting.

Now everyone was flushed, happily tired, torn by twigs and conscious of prickers in shoes, sunburned, tumbled, and glad to strike at last the straight trail that led them a downward two miles directly into camp.

"John," Kate said, in an odd tone. He turned in the path. "Let the others get a little bit ahead," the girl said, with a nod. "I want to talk to you."

Handsome and grave and attentive, and with a little apprehensive paleness coming under his country brown, he delayed his steps, and they walked along slowly, side by side.

"I want to tell you something, John. But it must be in absolute confidence!" said Kate.

"I suppose I know what it is?" John made himself say, in the silence. And he gave her his good smile.

"Has Tom ever spoken to you about it?" the girl asked, quickly.

He knew now. "No, but of course I've suspected it."

"John," Kate told him, seriously, widening the beautiful starry blue eyes under her rough little tramping hat, "he sees her *almost* every day! And she's *divorced,* you know——"

John Kelly, thirty years old, and supporting himself in a harsh, cold world for sixteen of them, experienced the most staggering emotion of his life. Kate, fortunately too deeply and anxiously absorbed in what she was saying to take particular note of his manner, had stopped short, and was staring at him significantly, fearfully, impressively.

Behind her, pines, and far below, the lake. All about the sweetness of the silent afternoon woods. A jay hopped near them, flashed away with a bright streak of blue.

There she stood, with Tom's old gloves on her hands, and an open blue shirt of Peter's, washed sky white, meeting her sturdy, shabby, faded corduroy skirt. Her honest beautiful face burned by the sun, her blue eyes preoccupied, the aureole of her hair pressed in little moist gold rings against her rough little round hat.

John's throat grew dry, everything tipped and dazzled before him. Tom in love with somebody else? But then—but then——

"I'm going to tell you about it," Kate was saying quickly, "although it means breaking my word. I've got to, or I'll go crazy. They're all being so lovely to me, they're all so pleased—the darlings!—to think that Tom and I—that Tom—that I would ever—or that he would, for that matter——"

She stopped, floundering.

"You mean they believe that he's in love with you?" asked John's voice. He was conscious of a frightened determination that he mustn't betray himself, mustn't ever let her know that he, too, had been planning all his life, selecting his every word and movement, under that very misapprehension.

"Exactly!" she said, scarlet yet laughing. "Of course he's *not.*"

"Of course," John echoed, clearing his throat, and speaking rather flatly.

"He's in love with this Mrs Newman, who is getting a divorce," Kate summarized, rapidly. "She has a flat out on Gough or Octavia Street or somewhere, and she really seems to be an awfully nice woman; Tom got to know her in Paris, and he's—well, he's just *drunkenly* in love! He doesn't think about anything else, he's there all the time. And she is an orthodox Jewess, John, the niece of a rabbi, Rabbi Garberg—so you can imagine! Aunt Mollie would rather see him in his shroud than married out of the Church, and as far as *I* can see her people would considerable rather see *her* in hers. And neither Aunt Mollie nor Uncle Peter has the remotest notion of it!"

"You mean he wants—expects—to marry her, Kate?"

"Well, I don't *know.* But the thing is, he's mad about her, and—some time last spring this was—he told her so. Well, then she was wild, said

she never intended to marry again, and would live for the child——"

"A child?"

"She has a little girl. So she and Tom had a fight, and it almost killed him. But after a few days they made it up, and then he told me that he was under promise not to breathe another word of it until she got her divorce—and that's just before next New Year's. But they saw each other."

"For the Lord's sweet sake!" John murmured, unable to assimilate this totally unsuspected news.

"Yes. We'd better keep walking," Kate said, "or they'll suspect us of some plot. Well! Up to the time we came up here, Tom told me everything. He used to come into the Library and talk about her for hours—the little dimple she had in her temple, and the way she frowned at him, and had to smile in spite of herself, and all that."

"For the Lord's sweet sake!" John commented again, in healthy contempt. And as he spoke he noted the adorable trick she had of blinking once or twice rapidly when she wished to be especially emphatic.

"But these last months," Kate continued, worriedly, "Tom hasn't talked so much. And I don't like it! I imagine it's gone—pretty far with them both. And then, this very week-end, Uncle Peter was talking to me about going back to the Library—I ought to be back there on the twenty-first, you know, and that's a week from tomorrow. And I've had several unexpected weeks of holiday as it is. And darling Uncle Peter talked about my being—in a way"—Kate qualified apologetically—"a comfort to poor Aunt Mollie while Paul has been so ill, and all that, and he asked me so sweetly if I wanted to go back at all, and he spoke of—he really spoke," she went on, in a worried voice, "as if Tom and I had it practically all settled, and as if you and Cecy——"

"Cecilia and I!" John exclaimed, reddening. "Why, what on *earth* ——"

"No, I don't mean that you had it settled!" Kate hastened to explain. "But that perhaps he might hope that some day you would."

"But Cecy certainly has a case—a terrible case on young Taylor," John offered, simply.

"But, John——" began Kate. She had to say it! It was so delicious to be talking to him at last, about these tremendous and thrilling things, to be murmuring confidentially, intimately with him, with his handsome face at one instant so grave, and the next so flashing with interest, at one minute concerned, at the next smiling his own peculiarly irradiating smile. "John," she accused him, smilingly, "you *did* like Cecy?"

"I thought she was very nice when she was quite a little girl," he admitted, innocently. "I don't know that I ever told any one—I'm sure I didn't. But I used to think she was a very dear, sweet little girl, when they were talking about her going into the convent."

"Oh, so we did!" Kate recalled, struck, pausing again before they limped into camp. "I remember that!"

"But then, Kate—then, Kate," John said, awkwardly, in their last moment together, "then I hope you will marry somebody else than Tom, because you certainly deserve that some fine man—should make you happy—if you loved him——" stumbled on poor John, so bewildered by new hopes and fears that he hardly knew what he was saying, or what he wanted to say.

Later, hammering down toward the city with Peter and Tom, he flushed, bit his lip, paled, and flushed again, thinking of the confused absurdity of this stammered speech. She so composed, so sweetly attentive and natural, and he, clearing his throat, laughing, growing red, avoiding her look. "Some fine man!" Would she remember that particular ill-selected phrase, and think he had been alluding to himself? Why couldn't he have said: "Kate, have I any chance?" Or why couldn't he at least have said: "Kate, may I tell you some day what all this gives me the right to hope?"

Tomorrow would be Monday. On Saturday night, perhaps, beside the long table under the trees, filling the dinner glasses with spring water, perhaps reading about the Patchwork Girl to Paul, perhaps laughing and murmuring with Cecy, down at the lake's edge, he would see the sweet, slender figure, the shining hair, the straight clean line of her chin, he would hear that rich, laughing voice of hers! John's entire week was spent in thinking what he would say to her.

She had seized one single fortuitous minute this evening to say to him: "Advise me. Ought I tell Uncle Peter?" and John, after the supper which they had all said they were too tired to eat, and had eaten enormously, had seized another to answer: "Tell Tom *he* has to tell his father!"

CHAPTER XV

Tom, approached by Kate a few days later, flatly refused to consider this.

"Why worry Pop?" asked Tom. "He's got enough on his mind. There's nothing to tell him, anyway."

"You mean she won't be free until December?"

"She doesn't think she'll be free then!" Tom laughed mirthlessly, briefly. "Religion's a funny thing, Kate," he added. "You'd think it would be something to make a person happier, wouldn't you? Instead of coming between a perfectly sane, straight, decent man and woman of —well, in the middle twenties," substituted Tom, who was extremely sensitive about Babette's twenty months' seniority, and never alluded to it,—"and making them miserable! What business is it of theirs? If I love her, and she loves me, and I can make her a home, and she can give me everything I want in God's world without harming anybody, who's business it is but ours? Why should Mom cry her eyes out, and Aunt Allie

and Aunt Mag think I'm going straight to hell, and Babette be badgered to death by *her* family——?" He shrugged, lighted a cigarette. "It's funny," he finished. "All in the name of God and religion!"

"Any rules that are made for everybody hurt somebody, sometimes," Kate generalized, mildly. Inwardly she was terrified. This was no way for a Cunningham to talk! "Do you like her as much as ever, Tom?" she asked, timidly.

Tom smiled at her, his handsome face one wide grin, his blue eyes twinkling.

"Pretty near," he answered. And Kate knew that he and Babette thoroughly understood each other, and that Tom was not afraid of anything coming between them.

"But, Tom, won't you talk to your father?"

"Nix, sweetheart. It wouldn't do any good, and it would only worry Pop. No," Tom mused, half aloud, "some day we may walk around the corner and get married, and then'll be time enough!"

But he talked to Babette about it.

"Kate says we ought to tell Pop," he said, kissing her soft little ear where the silky dark hair curled about it. Babette was where she loved to be, curled up in his big arms, and both were watching a September fire.

"And what do you think, my dear?" her voice asked, idly, the subtle little oriental hint in the tone thrilling him as it never failed to thrill him.

"I think not."

"And I think not! Tom, we'll never be so happy again, once any one knows. And we're so happy——"

"The family comes home next week," Tom told her, after a while. "And then it won't be so easy for me to get away evenings."

"And Jean comes home to stay," Babette sighed and smiled. "Fancy my even being a little sorry about *that!*" she said. "But this has been the only real happiness in my life. And it *can't* be wrong, whatever they say, to be so happy."

"My girl!" Tom said, kissing her hair.

"Tom, what's going to come out of it all?" the woman asked, out of a silence.

"Our marriage, my darling."

"As easy as all that?" she asked, between a sigh and a laugh.

"Our marriage, very simple and quietly, both being free, white, and twenty-one," Tom pursued. "And then we take a little apartment—I'd like this one——"

"I wouldn't!" interrupted Babette, and shuddered.

"Well, no, neither would I. But I mean something like this one, and we have our little girl trotting to school, and our music, and books, and you lunch downtown with me whenever you feel like it——"

"Which would be every day," Babette interpolated, kissing him.

"Which would be every day. And we have our few friends, who come to dinner——"

"Not too often, Tom!"

"Not oftener than once every ten years," he reassured her, and Babette laughed. "And then we have an occasional concert, movies, theaters, Sundays off in the country with the car—I'll have my own car then. And gradually the family—or families, rather—will forgive us, and all's well on the Rappahannock!" finished Tom. "They'll want us long before we'll want them, sweetheart, believe you me!"

"And none of this sneaking and story-telling!" added Babette, with a deep sigh.

"None of this sneaking and story-telling—all out in the open."

"And the feeling that I belong to you, and everyone knows it, and not bribing Germaine, and ashamed to look my mother in the eye," the woman summarized. "And never—never, Tommy," she said, with hot cheeks, pushing a little thumb into each of his own cheeks, as she sat with her feet curled under her knees, and the blue eyes whose look she would not meet only a few inches away, "never feeling sorry that—that——"

"Oh, cut it!" he said, tenderly, amusedly, as she paused.

"I feel so—so astonished at myself, Tom. Jean's mother."

"Oh, cut it, sweetheart. We love each other. Don't be ashamed to let me know you love me."

"Tom, we aren't bad, then?"

"Bad? Why, my dear girl, what a silly way to talk! What could possibly be *bad* about it?"

Babette rested quietly against his breast, her fingers locked in his, his dreamy eyes on the fire. Besides the flickering soft light there was only that of one dim lamp in the little room.

"Marrying a man you hate for money, *that's* where the badness comes in—all these made marriages, with no real love in them, that's the real sin!" Tom said, after a while.

"But people don't say so, the world doesn't say so, Tom."

"Yes, and the world is a place made up of filthy, hypocritical, stupid, vile-minded asses!" Tom assured her, good-humoredly.

"Tom, would your father be very angry if some day we were to marry?"

"Would, did you say, or *will?"*

"Well——" She laughed softly. *"Will,* then."

"No—I don't know. I suppose he will, for a while, but on the other hand he may be awfully decent about it. He adores the whole crowd of us."

"He sounds so nice," Babette said, wistfully. "Perhaps, some day," she added, rather low, "if there was a—an unusually nice little—person—named Peter, in the family, he'd forgive me."

Tom trembled. He bunched her soft little fingers in his to kiss them. "He'll love you long before that, sweet."

"But your mother won't," Babette predicted, quickly.

"You and Mother will adore each other, because you're the two finest women I've ever known!" Tom assured her, calmly.

"And who comes third?"

"Well, I suppose Kate, my cousin, Catherine Walsh."

"Sometimes," Babette confessed, smiling, "I get a little jealous of your Kate——"

And as Tom returned a thoughtful and affectionate "Kate's a wonder," she fell silent. Presently, with a little touch of weariness and coldness, she sent him away.

"Listen, darling, it isn't ten. Germaine never gets back until after eleven; she and her gang go to the nine-oclock show."

"Yes, but she might come in—and you were here until ten last night."

"Tired of me, Babette?" he asked, a little hurt, smiling down at her. They were standing now, near the door.

"Tired of everything, myself—life!" she answered, her tears coming, as she rested her face against his shoulder. "It's all so stupid, Tommy!" she whispered.

"May I come tomorrow afternoon?"

"Oh——!" She raised her head quickly, and at her astonished and alarmed tone they both laughed. "Oh,—you *must!*"

He kissed her gently, went quietly away. She had been in a different mood, he remembered, upon a certain evening a few weeks ago, when radiant in some shimmering silky thing, and thrilled by the glorious music they had been evoking at the piano she had held his hand tight while he had slammed the door dutifully, to impress a possibly wakeful Germaine, and had flung herself in a silent ecstasy of mirth and recklessness into his arms a second later.

But he loved all her moods, indeed he held everything about her in a reverence and devotion deeper than anything that had ever come into his life before. He trembled at the mere thought of her—his little, winsome, clever, trusting Babette. She was so full of fears, conventions imagination.

"Tommy, are we playing with fire?" she asked him, a hundred times And a hundred times he answered patiently:

"My darling, if it were not for you I *would* plunge into the fire! There would be none of this wretched waiting for a legal thing called a decree and for a license, between you and me then! They could chatter themselves to death, I would never know it! We are only waiting because of your mother, and mine. Nothing could make you more my wife than you are this minute, and nothing our love ever brings us is going to seem wrong—to me!"

Tonight, glowing with tenderness, hope, all the felicity of the lover who knows himself beloved, he walked all the long way home, and entered the big house in Howard Street to find Cecilia awaiting him.

She was sitting up in her big bed, reading in a pool of light, with her curly dark hair in two short braids on her shoulders. Ellen was

boarding-school now, and Cecy had the big room to herself. Her mother and Paul were still in the mountains, but were expected to return in a few days. Meanwhile, Aunt Allie and the servants were getting the house in order, keeping an eye on Cecy and Martin, and taking care of Peter and Tom, who came home every night.

"Come in," Cecy invited her brother. "Shut that door. Is"—she lowered her voice cautiously—"is Pop's light out?"

"Yep. It's after eleven," Tom said, conscious of a slight sense of reluctance to be forced to think of anything but Babette. "What's up?"

"Nothing's *up*," Cecy answered in a somewhat worried tone. And now Tom noticed that she looked both frightened and pale.

"What you been doing?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Nothing," Cecy said again, quickly. "Only—— Did you shut that, Tom?"

"Sure," Tom answered, lighting a cigarette.

"The thing is—and if Aunt Allie snoops in here, for heaven's sake be ready to talk about something else," Cecilia began again, nervously. "The thing is—and I know there's nothing in it, only—only I was wondering if maybe—maybe you'd *think* there was!"

"For the Lord's sake, *say* something!" Tom suggested.

"Well, here's what it is, Tom," the girl began, in a very low tone. "You know Dion's crowd—the Merrys and the Nortons and Jim Hungerford, and the two Pitcher boys—that crowd? Well, it was that crowd specially, although everybody else was in it, for the start—that is, we were all dancing and all that, at the Burlingame Club—there were grown-ups here, playing bridge, and all that——"

"When was this?"

"Last night."

"Oh, I see. Go on. Who were you staying with last night?"

"With Ethel Merry."

"Where?"

"Down at her house in San Mateo."

"Did Mom know it?"

"Well, no, because Ethel just invited me yesterday, over the telephone—said there was going to be dancing, and so on, just asked me down."

"Did you ask Aunt Allie?"

"In a way I did. I telephoned her at Grandma's, and she said she didn't like it with my mother out of town, and I said Mom would let me go down to Ethel's, and she said to telephone my father, and I did, and he had gone down to the warehouse, and so I—just went."

"And did Pop jump you tonight?"

"No, he didn't say anything about it. I guess he thought I'd asked Mama."

"Who took you down?"

"Dion and the Pitchers."

"Yes, and who chaperoned the dance?"

"There wasn't any special one. We were just all there together."

"Yes, but who'd you and the Merry girl go with?"

"Well, that was just it." Cecilia began to look worried again. "Her aunt was going, and then when we got to the club, she wasn't there."

"So you dined alone at the club with a lot of boys and Ethel Merry? My Lord, you must be loose, Cecy——"

"*Excuse* me. We dined at Ethel's, she and I and three boys. You know her mother's off on her honeymoon in Europe, and her father's sick in the hospital. But they have a lovely maid that her mother and father have had ten years, and the old Chinaman who just loves to cook——"

"Yes, but who looks out for Ethel?"

"Well, her father, of course. And his being in the hospital and her mother just married again was one reason she wanted me to go down and stay with her."

"Go on."

"There's nothing to it, really. After dinner Dion suggested that we go over to the club and dance, and we did—and *that* was all right, except that I felt sort of uncomfortable, not belonging to any party, but Ethel knows everybody—she's a regular terror, you know, but they all seem terribly fond of her—and so at about—well, a little after ten, we decided to go home, and Dion said his car had a flat, and that Jim Hungerford would drive us home."

"You ought to know better than that, Cecy," Tom said, gravely.

"But now *listen!*" Cecy pleaded, impatiently. "I know what kind of a man Jim is, and I took Dion aside and said, no, I wouldn't do that. And Dion was—he was all *right,* but he was a little silly—that is, he drank a little—you do that yourself, Tom!" Cecy interrupted herself, as Tom began to shake his head.

"My God, Pop'd skin you!" Tom said, simply.

"But *listen.* Dion said he'd come along, and the two Pitchers got in and they were awfully nice. They're both in college at Stanford, and the big one said he had left his banjo at the fraternity house, and that he'd have to miss a train to Del Monte to get it, tomorrow. So we said we'd skim down that way, and he could get it. It was only about sixteen miles a perfectly straight road.

"Now, Tom, what was the harm in that?" Cecy demanded, pathetically interrupting herself. "It was bright moonlight, we were two girls, and all the boys were as nice and quiet as they could be. In fact, Dion had gone to sleep. I was sitting in front, with Jim, and he talked to me awfully nicely. There was absolutely *nothing*——"

"Go on," Tom urged her, briefly, as she paused.

"Well, that was all right; they stopped at the fraternity house, and some awfully nice boys came out, and Jim said he was Ethel's brother, and the boys asked us if we would come down to a dance some day—that was all right. So then we came flying back, and we were almost home when the boys said that there was a party at the 'Merry-go-round'——"

"My God!" Tom commented, in another pause.

"They asked us if we'd just like to go and look on for five minutes, hey said all we need have is a lemonade, and watch, from a corner, and ee some of the fun. I didn't want to——" Cecy protested, frightened t her brother's face. "But they kept saying that all sorts of people came n from the road, just driving by, and that it was perfectly safe, and that here would be three hundred people there—some of them awfully decent eople at that—and the others all wanted to go—they were crazy to go!" ecy said, fervently.

"You didn't go into the 'Merry-go-round', Cecy?"

"Well, Tom, with all the others!"

"All right, I don't know what happened," Tom said, darkly, "but it as coming to you, whatever it was!"

"Nothing happened!" Cecy answered, sharply, with a touch of youthful ignity. "We sat there for about twenty minutes, and it wasn't much fun, ecause just some perfectly stupid people who looked like stenographers nd school-teachers were dancing around—girls in hats and shirtwaists! —and so we stayed about half an hour, and then came out, and the boys rove us home."

"You got out of it darned cheap, let me tell you!"

"Yes, but here's what was worrying me. While we were there a man ame up to us, who knew one of the Pitchers, a fellow named Young, nd he was sort of silly and sentimental——"

"Lit?" Tom interpreted, briefly.

"Well, a little. And he told Ethel he knew who she was, and told her er name, and he said to me, 'And I know who you are, too, but I can't emember your name just at the minute!' And he said we had no business here—I guess he was about forty, anyway he's old. So then when we ere going, he asked us if we ever read the *Mailbag,* and we said 'Yes.' And he said, 'Well, don't miss this week's copy.' I thought he was just ooling——" Cecy stopped short in distress, her cheeks blazing.

"But yesterday, this evening in fact, Ethel telephoned to know if I ould go down tomorrow," she added, uncomfortably. "And I said no, hat Mama and Paul would be coming home, and I had to be here, and he said that Jim Hungerford had told her yesterday that this man oung *does* write things for the *Mailbag,* you know the horrible sort of ning, and that he heard that he had put us in it!"

She ended the story abruptly, and sat looking fearfully at her brother. om whistled, his chest rising and falling on a deep sigh. His sister ssumed a more and more frightened expression.

"Tom, he won't, will he?"

"I don't know. Gosh, what a mess!" Tom said, and pondered, scowl- ng. "Cheer up, Cecy, if he does, Pop may not see it. And even if he sees , everyone knows how rotten those weeklies are."

"Oh, but, Tom—— But, Tom—I can't bear it! I shall die," Cecy ex- laimed in an agony. "Can't you do something, Tom, can't you telephone

and say that Papa will sue them? They *couldn't*—it would be indecen for them to do something that would hurt me so terribly—I'd never liv it down, it wouldn't be fair if a newspaper could do that——"

"Lord, they don't mind *that!* If they only say what's true, they knov they're safe enough," Tom assured her, frowning, and staring into spac as he considered the case. "If I were you," he advised, after a long silenc during which all Cecy's vague uneasiness and fears had crystallized int actual panic, "if I were you, I'd tell Pop. I'd tell him that you were witl these people that Mom lets you visit, and you didn't realize the sort o a place it was——"

"Oh, I can't! Oh, I wish I was dead!" Cecy whispered, deathly pale

"Le's see, this is Friday," Tom mused. "It won't be in tomorrow' *Mailbag,* that's a cinch. It'll be in a week from Saturday, if he wasn' just bluffing you—which he may have been. I'll tell you what to do, tal to Kate about it. She's got sense. And if she thinks there's a chance i the world, I'll go down to the *Mailbag* office——" His voice dropped dubiously. Cecy buried her face in her hands.

He left his sister a little later, with no more definite plan outlined. Th *Mailbag* was as bold as a rattlesnake, and as dangerous. Eagerly seize by the whitest and most jeweled of the city's hands, eagerly carried int the most perfumed and luxurious of boudoirs, it left behind it weekl a sinister wake of hatred, suffering, spite, and fury. Here all divorce family fights, scandals, were carefully simmered and seasoned, here innc cent names were linked, and contented ignorance turned into suspicio and misery.

Yet it flourished, as does its like in every society in the world, an Cecilia was afraid of it, as are most women. She spent a sleepless an uncomfortable night, and met her mother and Paul the next day in mood so gentle and so chastened that Mollie thought her dear little cor vent girl, untouched by all the feverish society ideals of the Peninsul set, had come back to her.

Everybody had gathered at the house when Mollie came home: Kat and Maggie Walsh, Allie, Mart, Tom, Peter, Cecy, and Ellen. Little Pat was lifted from the car still clinging to Mart's hand, chattering joyously and when he had been tenderly transferred to the big nursery, ever member of the family had a turn at peeping in at him, or coming in t sit beside him. Mollie, bravely smiling, sharing Paul's delight in th transformation of the room that had been turned into a palatial priso for him, caught a glimpse of herself in the big hall mirror; she was ge ting old. The agony of the child's accident seemed to sweep over her i its full force once more, seeing again these rooms and halls that had bee the setting of the terrible scene.

Pete looked old, too, and grave, she thought. It was hard on an adorin father to see this limp, flat little body carried in through the wide hal of the home he had built for his children. Between Kate and Mart, and th plate of ice-cream Allie had carried up to him, the child himself seeme

happy enough, his mother thought, torn by a deep sigh, but oh, the difference between today's home-coming and that of last summer, of all the happy summers when sunburn and poison-oak and sprained ankles had been the darkest details of the Cunninghams' full holiday history!

Had she ever had him, sturdy and bold and self-reliant? Had it really been Paul who climbed ladders and slipped down in mud, who had come flying into his father's room to scramble upon Peter's big chest in the mornings, riotous in his woolly pajamas, hammering and kicking?

Already the baby roundness had gone for ever from his body, and the baby arrogance from his eyes. Paul had suffered, and the bright smile that so often lighted his white, triangular little face was unearthly sweet because of the hours of pain behind it. Eight years old, and already "patient," already "meek," under the decisions of the big surgeons. Terrible words, "patient" and "meek," to apply to a child! "If Mart'll jus' hold my hand, like he does," had been Paul's only stipulation, before the last painful examination. And often he said, "I love you, Mom. You're awful kind to me, Pop. Gee, you're all kind to me!"

"How do you think he looks, Peter?" Mollie asked, changing her dress in all the luxury of her own walled, carpeted, curtained room, that seemed quite overwhelming after so many months of pine floors and cold water.

"Grand," Peter answered, heartily. "He's all right. He looks like another child!"

This, considering that his father had seen him but two weeks before, was an overstatement, but it was what Mollie wanted to hear. She smiled at Peter, running her favorite old yellow comb through her thinning hair, and said sympathetically:

"But *you* look tired tonight, Pete; are you tired?"

For answer he glanced at the new copy of the *Mailbag,* folded open and doubled back, and said heavily:

"You may as well know about this, Mollie. Suppose we call Cecy in? It may all be a lie."

So Cecy was summoned, and spent a wretched and tearful half hour facing her father and mother. The article was not scurrilous, after all; it was merely to the effect that at the "Merry-go-round" roadhouse, on Thursday night, two of the prettiest of the débutantes had been demurely enjoying lemonades: E—— M——, escorted by the usually enthusiastic youths, who were indicated, and "the grocer's ambitious daughter, who doesn't seem to care what her brand-new society friends do, as long as she is graciously permitted to be with them."

Some man in the office had drawn Peter's attention to it, and while he was strangely quiet about it, neither Cecilia nor his wife had ever seen him in such a mood, and they were frightened to the deeps of their souls.

"What can he do? What can he do?" Cecy kept asking herself, quaking. Under all her hot shame at the belittling terms by which she had been identified, was an unreasoning terror of her father.

She answered his brief, harsh questions sullenly. Nothing had happened, she kept telling herself resentfully, so why should he make such a fuss? "Don't *yell* at me," she longed to say, pettishly.

Mollie wept bitterly. Her full, soft face was blotched and soaked with tears. They kept brimming and brimming while she listened, and burst forth in gushes whenever she spoke.

"Don't, Papa—she didn't mean any harm. Oh, Cecy, what could you be thinking of that you'd deceive Papa and me, and get yourself talked about!" faltered Mollie. And once she said: "Bad luck to such dirty-mouthed, lying men that'd publish such things about young girls that wouldn't ever know the badness of the world, and walked into it unbeknownst! 'The grocer's daughter!'"

"As far as *that* goes," Peter commented, darkly, frowning under bushy brows as he walked to and fro, "that's exactly what she is, and if she's ashamed of it, more shame to her. But to have my ger'rl, that was brought up decent and clean among clean and decent people, runnin' after them society people—well, there'll not be any more of it! Cecilia——"

"Papa?" Cecilia quavered, trembling in her big chair, and putting her little handkerchief to her brimming eyes.

"Have you got any more engagements with these precious friends of yours?" Peter demanded.

"Well, Papa—but they're all the friends I *have!*" Cecilia protested, upon a bitter burst of crying. "And if you're going to make me go with horrible common people—well, they're good enough but they're so stupid and *common* they make me sick!—like the Prendergasts and the Cudahys and the Haleys," she sobbed, incoherently, "you might just as well *kill* me!"

"The Haleys and the Cudahys are common, are they?" Peter asked in a measured tone, and with a shrewd look.

"She on'y means they're not in society, Papa!" Mollie interpolated, anxiously.

"I don' think she knows what she means," Peter said, with a suddenly quieter manner. "Poor child, these wild crazy young boys, wastin' their fathers' money, runnin' their speed cars, have got hold of her, and there's nothin' so silly or wicked she won't admire it in them. I'm not sorry about this," Peter added, glancing at the magazine, "for all it's called me is a grocer, and God knows that's a clean enough job for any man and if it's showed me that my little ger'rl is as much a fool as all the others, perhaps I ought to thank God for that, too. But we'll have no more of this society talk, Cecy, and if the Cudahys and the Haleys ain't good enough for you, you can sit at home, and say your beads! You tell your mother where you're going to be, every minute of the day and night from now on, and the day you deceive the either of us you'll——"

"Papa dear, don't talk so, she'd never do that!" Mollie pleaded, pitifully.

Cecilia rose to her feet, pale under the youthful freckles, and staring defiantly at her father.

"If Dion Taylor wants me to marry him, I'll marry him in spite of everything you say, and you can't stop me!" she said, her nostrils dilating and her breast heaving. And she left the room with a sharp slam of the door that was echoed, a few seconds later, by a second slam of her own, across the hall.

"Leave her be," Peter said, sadly and tenderly. "She'll come 'round. We can't treat them nowadays as if they were children still. The poor child! She'd put her hands into the pitch, and where'd she find one of that society crowd with soul enough or common decency enough to stand back of her, or pull her out of a hole?"

Mollie went about her interrupted dressing, tearful, frightened, and subdued. Her heart was sick within her. She was hurt and astonished that Dion Taylor evidently had not yet said anything definite to Cecy; there had seemed to be a renewal of all their old intimacy this summer. She was deeply cut, too, in spite of all her honest common sense, by the term "grocer's daughter"; it would surely injure Cecy's chances with all the society crowd, to be so described. Mollie's face burned, thinking that they were all laughing and talking about it today.

And from these secondary considerations, and an occasional deep sigh on Paul's account, the original incredible sting of having her little girl's name mentioned in the scandalous columns of the *Mailbag* was a serious blow. Even innocent little Paul's disaster paled before the first touch of anything like shame. Allie would widen horrified eyes at it, Maggie would have a great deal to say, everybody would know it. Mollie did not know where to turn for comfort.

"God bless *that* child, anyway, and make it all right betwixt her and Tom," Mollie thought, as Peter's silent grimness, Cecy's paleness and tears, and the entire family's mystified interest in the suspected scene, opened the evening badly.

It was Kate of whom she spoke, Kate who, with Mart, had improvised a new game for Paul's delectation. It simply consisted of some member of the group entering Paul's room wrapped in a sheet. Paul was allowed three questions and three guesses as to the ghost's identity, and the game for some obscure reason had been already christened, for all time, "Scooby."

When Paul, shuddering with ecstasy, wrongly guessed "Aunt Allie," Allie was "free" and could come in from the hall, where the group was churning about, to watch the other guesses. But when Paul guessed rightly, the ghost became "goofed," and had to lie on the floor without moving, until Paul guessed wrongly again.

Mollie would have thought it improbable, if she had analyzed it at all, that anything could make her, or make Peter, laugh tonight. Yet their happiness in the little boy's happiness was too much for any mood of

anxiety, depression, or sorrow. He was at home again, and he was making the house ring with mirth.

Kate and Mart were irrepressible. John Kelly came in, and was pressed into service as a ghost, the maids were brought noiselessly up from the kitchen, and as a crowning touch, the old night-watchman, knowing of the afternoon's arrival, and ringing the bell to ask for his little chum, was duly turned into a ghost.

Mollie, freed, and in the big chair near Paul's bed, laughed the tears into her eyes at the sight of Peter, meekly lying on the floor, as a "goof." Tom, doubled up, to deceive his little brother as to stature, and imitating Aunt Allie's "Glory be to the everlasting glory!" was the success of the evening.

Yet the supernumeraries, laughing and breathless, in the upper hall outside the nursery door, had their serious moments.

"Pete's fit to be tied at Cecy!" Allie, divesting herself of the sheet, murmured to Maggie.

"Whatever on earth for?" Maggie, robing Kate for the ordeal, murmured back.

"They say the *Mailbag* had somethin' about her bein' down at a roadhouse with a lot of drunks," Allie supplied, after a hilarious interval. "They had an awful scene in Pete's room just before dinner, him and Cecy and Mollie."

"I noticed Cecy'd been crying," Kate breathed, awed. "For heaven's sake, isn't that awful!"

"Don't say nothing about it. Here, Jawn, it's you! Put your hands up over your head—lissen, don't you want to take that coat off? Kate, put his coat on a chair!"

"He's cute in his shirt-sleeves," Kate thought, receiving the garment from John Kelly. "He's bigger than Tom, if he is an inch shorter."

To Cecy the whole evening was one horror of shame and confusion and anger, and she was glad to crawl into bed, and bury her head, and forget it all in sleep. But the next morning was not much better, her mother was sorrowful and silent, her father cold toward her, and the interest of the remainder of the family in her troubles curious rather than sympathetic.

Deep under the stinging sense of unpopularity was the fear that Dion and his crowd would really go out of her life for ever, and her brief first intoxicating draught of social prominence be her last. She had no real claim on any of them; she *would* have, some day, she determined, with angry tears, but she must await Dion's pleasure, or Ethel's, now. Papa and Mama she could easily coax into permitting her to go to San Mateo again, for just one more trial, but she did not feel half so sure that the essential invitations would be forthcoming. Dion, as an admirer, was almost as unsatisfactory as Ethel, as a friend.

Ethel was rich, twenty-eight, homely, vivacious, neglected. She did daring things, because nobody paid any attention to her otherwise. She

got "crushes" on other girls, and talked them to death, and bored them with her silliness for brief periods, only promptly to forget them. This year she was riding to hounds in breeches, last year reading palms, plunged into the occult; what it would be next year, nobody knew. She really did know everybody in the smartest set, and the friends of her recently divorced and remarried mother were indulgent toward her, but there were few desirable qualifications in Ethel, as a social sponsor, and Cecy experienced some boredness, much distrust, and even moments of actual compunction, when she visited Ethel, and after a few months of her erratic friendship found herself occasionally wishing heartily that he might, in some sweeping fashion, terminate the acquaintance one and for all.

Dion had only to push the matter of their engagement a shade further, and all would be well. Cecy's feeling for him now was not what it had been in the happy beginnings of their affair, almost two years ago. There was no glamor and no thrill about him, no blind trust in her own charms, now. She appreciated perfectly that he was a spoiled, shallow, selfish young fellow, looking always for novelty and amusement, and entirely indifferent to its cost to him or any one else.

But, on the other hand, he and Cecy had come to know each other well. They had many a memory in common, there was a comfortable easiness between them. He had a way of saying: "There'll be the Moores, chaperoning, and you and me, and Arthur and Mary——" thus pairing himself with Cecy, as a matter of course. He usually danced with her a good deal, when opportunity offered, although he made small effort to have her included in the general festivities of his group, and Cecy had to fight a hard fight for every invitation. She hungered for this forbidden life with an actual ache of desire. The spacious upstairs bedrooms where maids assumed charge of coats, the porches where other maids passed trays of cool drinks, the gossiping, bridge-playing women whose white hands flashed with jewels, who were just home from Europe, just off for Europe, going here for the golf tournament and there for the horse show, poor little Cecy studied and envied them all.

Had her father and mother, the girl thought resentfully, been of a different type; had they built their home in San Mateo, and mingled with this glittering group, as which, Cecy repeated over and over again, they were "every bit as good", then she would have been naturally placed where she so longed to be, one of the lucky girls who flitted about among the big homes and the smart clubs, with everyone friendly, all doors open, any prospect possible.

Indeed, if her mother had been one of the Peninsula set, she might announce her engagement to Dion tomorrow. Sheer force of environment would carry it successfully then. Everyone would expect it, further it, help it into being. On a wave of general laughter and approval it would be carried to the luncheon and engagement-cup stage, and within

a few weeks everybody, including Dion, would consider it merely on more fact in a world of facts.

But with Papa and Mama hopeless socially behind her, with nobody t help her, advise her, entertain for her, and with the pretentious bi Howard Street house for her setting, Cecy felt overwhelmingly handi capped.

No, she must just go on for a while longer, bearing with Ethel becaus Ethel offered a door into Dion's world, accepting eagerly such crumbs o other invitations as came her way, forcing herself always to be cheerfu and confident, and hoping—hoping—hoping for the moment when i Dion's mind, as well as her own, the vague understanding existing be tween them should crystallize into something definite.

Sometimes she actually disliked him, for his casual and entirely unin tentional cruelties. Sometimes, talking about him to the other girls, sh felt a pained sort of love for him well in her heart. Much of the time sh did not think of him as a person at all; he was the objective point of he ambitions, that was all. Her anxiety and fatigue in the pursuit of it ha blotted out, for a while, his actual personality and her feeling for hin

"How about lunch at the St Francis Tuesday?" he would say.

"Love it! One o'clock?"

"One o'clock. I'll see if I can get that Arliss girl—my mother says ought to do something for her, and she's lots of fun. And I'll get Clarl too."

And the expectations of a little luncheon for two, possibly importan and in any case an advertisement to the world of their close friendshi would be dashed, for Cecy, almost before they were formed.

Once, before her mother's return from the country, he had asked he to dine with him downtown and go to the theater, "just us, huh?" Cec had somehow felt that at this affair the vital moment might come. Sh had duly asked her father, adding calmly that there would be other ar older members in the party. Her heart had brimmed with those fres hopes that each such concrete evidence of Dion's feeling for her arouse and she had spent the dreamy day that preceded the event itself in happy world of imagination. If she and Dion became engaged tonight- if, at this time next week, it were really announced, and in the papers- if his mother, now in New York, telegraphed her, and she had a ring- ah, what happiness! What satisfaction, telling Kate and Aunt Magg and everyone, telling Ethel, who was still unwed, and twenty-eight! Ho good and busy and contented Cecilia Cunningham would be then!

But at five o'clock her heart had sunk, turned to stone. A letter fro Dion had arrived, and two tickets for the hateful show had been e closed. He was "crazy with headache, too much bachelor party. 'Chuc Beresford's party," he had written. "Everything off for tonight. Bett luck next week."

Cecy had felt arise in her, as she held this communication in her han a veritable rage of fury against Dion, her parents, her life, against h

y faith. There was no use in praying, there was no omnipotent power, lly, working for people's happiness! She had torn tickets and letter wly into minute pieces.

'I'd like to know why *I'm* always the one to be humiliated, to be bbed?" she had said aloud, in a hard, slow voice. "I'd like to know Dion Taylor is any better than I am, if it's fair that he can do this sort thing, and I can't do *anything?"*

After the episode of the roadhouse and the *Mailbag,* she sank into a t of apathy, darkly unwilling to make herself agreeable in the con- ptible stupidness of the family circle, and unable to escape from it. telephoned Ethel twice, but Ethel seemed absorbed in other things, she dared not telephone Dion for fear of bringing her father's fury vn upon her head.

Cecy spent days idling, reading, loitering over to the Library to talk h Kate, ready to burst into tears at her mother's mildest reproof, and uming a martyred air when asked to perform the slightest domestic vice.

She read to Paul lifelessly. "How long did you want me to read, ma?" She declined Aunt Allie's invitation to accompany her to Ad- t services at the convent.

"You used to be so fond of the nuns, Cecy," Aunt Allie would say. nd they're always askin' after you."

"They always do that, about all the old girls."

"No, but Sister Aloysius certainly is very fond of you."

"Sister Aloysius is Mistress of Novices, that's why *she* always pre- ls to be so fond of girls."

"Cecilia, I won't allow that you should talk so silly about women that s their lives and all to God!"

"I'm sorry, Mama." And Cecy would push up her firm little lower under her red lip, half shut her eyes, and fix her bored and stubborn patiently upon space.

So Christmas came again, and again Mollie looked back at the last istmas, and could not believe that she had had anything about which ly to feel worried then. To be sure she had been anxious that Cecy's ir with Dion would proceed to the natural termination, but Tom had h home from Paris, affectionate and amusing, and Cecy had been g to the Taylors' New Year's party, after all. And Paul had had his cipede, and had ridden up and down the drive tirelessly, in his new little blue coat with the beaver collar and beaver cap, the strong little legs ning like a little walking beam. Paul——! Lying flat today, with rtin's gruff voice reading "Toomai" to him in an incoherent jumble.

ut the Christmas tree came, swathed and slim, and was set up in l's big room, and Allie brought the boxes of old trimmings down n the store closet, and Ellen brought the big square boxes of new up from the basement, and Kate arrived, glowing and excited, and ers and wreaths and telegrams began to come, and the turkey came.

Outside there was a windy cold rain, but airs deliciously warmed by the roaring fires, and deliciously chilled by the opening door, began to drift about, scented by pine, and baking bread, and violets. Surprises abounded behind every closed door. Scent spread itself from Ellen's litter of tissue-paper and sachet; Mollie put an apron over her old blue silk and gesticulated with a scissors; Allie propped a fist on her hip, sniffled with an upward jerk of her long nose, debated, and considered. Peter came in at half-past three, and his wife kissed him, and Ellen sprang into his arms and strangled him. Ellen had seen something strangely resembling a bicycle in shape, disguised under a sheet, in the back hall closet.

"Have you got the castor-oil and carpet tacks for Ellen's stockin'?" Peter asked, as he had asked for twenty happy Christmases of one stocking or another. And Ellen strangled him again.

"I've got too much for Paul," Mollie said, as she had always said. "I don't know that it's right—with so many poor this Christmas, and all. But the Foleys sent a crate would knock you down this year, and wait until you see what the Doyles sent!"

And Ellen and Paul shouted with anticipatory joy.

"Where's Tom?" Mollie asked then.

"Him and Jawn had to go uptown, they'll be out in no time," Peter answered. And if Mollie's heart might be said to have begun to hum contentedly at the statement, surely the heart of Kate Walsh, as she threaded tinsel balls with new wires, and clipped and measured, burst into song. She had seen John two nights ago, in a hilarious Orpheum party, with the Cudahys and Tom and Cecy. But somehow in the riot he had found time to say:

"Kate, when'll I see you again? There was something I wanted to say to you."

"Oh?" She had raised her beautiful dark brows interestedly. "Can't say it now?"

"Not very well I can't. It's something——" He had cleared his throat. "Something I hope won't make any difference between us, no matter what you think of it——"

Bursts of sunshine, sparkles and stars, spring perfumes of grass and lilacs and the rising strains of heavenly voices singing together had all taken possession of dingy O'Farrell Street, and had confused Kate as she answered:

"Aren't you going to be out at Aunt Mollie's Christmas Eve, to help trim the tree? We'll all be there."

"Well, yes, I guess I am," John had answered. And this was Christmas Eve, and John was coming. Into the cream and apricot of Kate's cheek a deep dimple pressed itself, and her blue eyes, turned toward Paul, toward her uncle, toward the bored and drooping Cecy, shone with a sort of liquid light.

Christmas Eve, and Peter and Mollie ready to thank God that the

dear baby was spared to them, anyway, that Cecy had gotten into no lasting mischief, anyway, that Tom was home again, anyway, and the comfort and delight of his father in the old firm! Christmas was Christmas, a time of home happiness and gratitude, after all.

And only a short mile away, in a little apartment house on Gough Street, Tom had just entered, with a strangely grim and ashen face, the familiar little parlor, and Babette, disheveled and panting, was holding his hands.

"Tell me about it, I don't get it!" Tom was saying.

And Babette, giving him the letter that had fluttered to the floor, was saying:

"Read it. It's from my husband's—attorneys. Germaine—you know she left me, she was very impudent and I discharged her Sunday—went right to my husband. He's going to file a counter-suit for divorce, he's going to fight for my baby, for Jean! Tom, Tom, if he gets her, if anything harms her or touches her, I'll kill myself! Read it, Tom. My husband's found out about you and me, and he threatens to name you as co-respondent!"

Tom, hardly sensing it, picked up the sheet with its neat legal heading. Furth & Hildebrand, speaking for their client, Mr Max Newman, desired to inform Mrs Babette Newman that Mr Newman, dissatisfied with the arrangements made for the complete custody of the child by her mother, would be glad to negotiate with Mrs Newman's lawyer regarding a more reasonable adjustment. Mr Newman, on the testimony of Germaine Pinés, lately in Mrs Newman's employ, would feel justified, in the event of Mrs Newman's not acceding to his reasonable demands regarding his daughter, in taking immediate steps to file a counter-suit for divorce, evincing Mrs Newman's friendship for Thomas J. Cunningham as grounds to prove her unfitness for guardianship of the child.

Tom read it twice, was still unable to sense it. Babette was staring at him, fearfully, expectantly.

"*Now* what?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVI

"Now what?" Tom echoed, a resentful flush staining his hard young Irish face, and a resentful glitter in his blue Irish eyes. "Why, now—now," he repeated, fighting for time, "we'll get married, that's all!" he ended, in relief. "We'll get married right away—the day you get your divorce. That'll end *that!*"

Babette was all at sea. She stared at him confusedly, took the official-looking letter from his hand, looked at it quite without seeing it, and looked blankly at him again.

"What will our getting married have to do with it?" she demanded, sitting down limply, without removing her gaze from his face.

"Well——" Tom began, on a great confident breath. "Well, he won't go on with it, once we're married," he asserted, a little vaguely.

"Why not?" Babette demanded, fearfully.

"Well——" He was still tremendously buoyant in manner but somewhat uncertain in speech. "You know he doesn't really want Jean," Tom offered.

"No," Babette said, struck. "That's true. He doesn't. He wants *me*."

"Exactly!" Tom said, triumphantly, relieved to see her own relief.

"He didn't want her when she was a baby—leaving us both to play poker all night!" Babette, musing aloud, said darkly. "Imagine, one night, when she was really quite ill——"

Tom winced interiorly. He hated the details. Her defence of herself, involving intimate revelations of all sorts, invariably offended some instinct of delicacy and dignity deep within him.

"I took the baby and went straight over to Papa!" she now finished her story. "And I was right."

Of course she had been right, poor little bewildered, ill-treated creature. But Tom did not like to think of her as boxed up here in this identical apartment with Max Newman, trailing about in delicate morning gowns on Sunday mornings, nursing her baby with this offensive, coarse cad looking on, quarreling—— "We got so that every word was a quarrel," she had told him, innocently, more than once.

Christmas horns sounded in the gray quiet of the street; a dense, cold wet fog was moving in a steady wall from the ocean, it boomed softly against the houses like a tangible thing. In the little room was order, warmth, all the delicate beauty of Babette's pretty furnishings: chintzes, rugs, lamps, large dim photographs of her friends.

"You know, Tom," the woman said with sudden force, getting to her feet, and walking a few restless steps, while her fingers pushed her dark hair away from the white forehead, "he'll never get her! Max Newman will never get my baby—he can be sure of that! I'd start tomorrow—I'd start tonight—for Paris, anywhere—I'd travel for ten years! But he'll never get her, he can make up his mind to that right *now!*"

"This is Thursday," Tom mused, scowling. "When could he file a suit?"

She sat down, restless, and breathing hard in her fright.

"Not tomorrow—that's Christmas. He might Saturday, I suppose."

"Saturday. But he probably wouldn't," Tom suggested, thinking it out; "if you intimated that you would be reasonable——"

"Reasonable! If that means that he is to have anything to say about Jean," Babette exclaimed, instantly firing, "I certainly will not be reasonable!"

"I said if you intimated——" Tom repeated, with a faint accent on the last word.

She looked at him sharply, comprehending, nodded her head and narrowed her eyes.

"You mean——?"

"I mean that you get your final decree of divorce on Tuesday."

"I see——" Babette said, slowly. "If I could keep him from acting until after Tuesday—— But he's smart," she broke off, suddenly, "he'll think of that!"

"Once you are absolutely free," Tom pursued, "I don't see what he could do. On Wednesday you and I will get married—on Tuesday evening, for that matter. Once you are my wife, I don't see that he can do anything."

Babette pondered, her dark brows drawn.

"Less than a week!" she said, in a whisper.

"Less than a week! We'll be married late Tuesday afternoon, and drive down to Carmel that night——"

"Jean?" she interrupted, anxiously, looking up.

"Jean with us, of course!"

"Five days—I ought to be able to get through five days," Babette said, restively. "But they make me so *nervous!* I'm just shaking all over—afraid of my own shadow——"

"I don't see why," Tom reassured her, sensibly. "You go to your mother tonight, stay there quietly, don't commit yourself to anything, just listen—seem to agree——"

"Oh, listen!" she repeated, despairingly. "You don't *know* how they worry me! My mother, my aunts—they're always telling me how Max has reformed, how much money he's making, how he's gone into a tobacco trust or syndicate or something, and what a good man he's come to be! They make me so *nervous!*" she said again.

"Well, can you stand it until Tuesday?" the man asked, practically. "Then come quietly into town with Jean, go to court and get your decree, meet me somewhere——"

"The point is," Babette, who had not been listening, interrupted, "what's best for Jean. The Court gave me Jean when I divorced Max—a year ago. I can't see how the Court can go back on its own decision!"

"Thanks to that French girl——" Tom began, bitterly, and stopped with a significant glance. Babette, meeting his eye, flushed.

She was sitting in a low chair, now she bent forward with her elbows on her knees, and buried her face in her hands.

"Oh, what a fool—what a fool I was!" she whispered. "What a—devil she must be! Her cousin, you know," Babette added, irrelevantly, looking up with dry eyes, "is my Aunt Bertha's cook. They've probably been watching us—spying——"

"Our only way out is to get married immediately, then they'll all lose interest in us," Tom argued.

"I suppose so." She sighed deeply. "If you only knew how hard they make it for me!" she said.

"Are they so fond of him?" Tom asked, jealously.

"Oh," she answered, impatiently, "I don't know what they want! They

like family life—they hate breaks—anything for peace! Mama used to dislike Max, and Papa, too. But he's my husband, and they think I ought to go back to him—that's all."

"They'll have absolutely nothing to do with your affairs this time next week," Tom reminded her. "I wouldn't say anything to your father and mother about the counter-suit, anyway. The holidays come in here, all you have to do is lie low, don't answer that letter, come quietly to town on Tuesday, get your divorce, you and I can get our license and be married that same afternoon! Just keep your courage up for another five days."

"Five days aren't long!" Babette said with a little tremulous laugh. And they fell to talking of the trip south, on New Year's Eve. Tom would telegraph the little hotel at Carmel. Jean and Babette, "my girls," he said, with tears standing in his Irish blue eyes, must have their heavy coats. Meanwhile, he must be looking up a small apartment of which they might take possession when, after a week of wandering, they came back. And if he couldn't find one they could go to the Hotel Fairmont for a while. "Can you imagine the rest—the *relief*—you are going to feel, when you get into the car, and tuck the robe around you, and hold Jean in your lap, and we start off down the Peninsula?" he asked her, admiring the bright color stain her thoughtful face, and her scarlet lips twitch with a smile in spite of herself.

"Tommy, just you and I and Jean, having a little supper and a fire, all to ourselves——!"

"And listening to the sea, and smelling the pines, and together—always to be together! Nobody's business what we do or where we go, lunches by the roadside, tramps over the hills in Marin County——"

"Ah, I've never had a chum!" she cried, longingly. And for a moment they were silent.

"Frightened any more, my sweetheart?"

"Oh, no. Max can't hurt us—I see that now. But getting that horribly businesslike looking document scared me almost to death. And I was all alone!"

"I'm obliged to Max," Tom said, whimsically. "Thanks to him everything will be hurried up several months. This time next month it will all be settled, and everybody will take it calmly for granted."

"Isn't it a comfort to think that! Babette Cunningham——" the woman mused, softly. "It's pretty, isn't it?"

"Mamma," said little Jean, from the doorway, in her pretty baby French, "am I to take Chou-chou to Grandmother's house?"

Babette and Tom had straightened suddenly, and now Babette went to kneel down before the lovely little creature in her picturesque brief velvet frock, and put her arms about her.

"Yes, my darling," she said, tenderly. "That's her new puppy that was sent her—from someone—for Christmas!" she explained, with a significant glance at Tom, over her shoulder.

"From my father!" Jean supplied, surprised at the omission.

"It came while I was downtown, trying to see my lawyer," Babette said. "And the new maid accepted it as a matter of course. It's a sweet, sweet puppy," she added, to satisfy Jean, who looked reproachful at her tone, "and we're going to take it over to Grandfather's. And that reminds me;" she added, getting to her feet, "that we must pack, if I'm going to my mother's. And under the circumstances I think it is the only thing to do. So I won't see you tomorrow, and don't try to see me——"

"But what about an engagement with me a week from today?" the man asked, trying to tease her into something like her usual calm.

"Ah, well, of course!" she said with a quick, unhappy smile. "But now, I must get to my mother and father," she added, nervously. "I tried to see Mr Meyers, my lawyer, today, but he wasn't at the office. However, I got him at his daughter's house, and gave him some idea of the situation, and he advised me to go to Mother at once. And he's crossing on the five-fifteen, too; he lives in San Rafael, so I'm to meet him, and we'll talk on the boat. I'm—I'm so nervous about her," Babette added, with a glance toward the bedroom door, where Jean had disappeared, "that every minute here is an agony to me. Once I'm at home with my father and brothers, I don't see that Max could do anything. But I think of her—she's such a quiet, loving little thing!—and of my packing her dear little wrapper and slippers and things to go to Aunt Bertha's, and of how Max would spoil her and wean her away from me! And Aunt Bertha has always said that I was too soft with her. She'd make her answer, and say 'please' and 'thank you,' and my darling would hang her little head, and begin to cry, and wonder where her mother was——"

"Now, now——" Tom said, soothingly.

"Oh, I know—I'm just silly! But it frightened me so——" She put her arms about his neck, raised her face. "You're so big and so comforting, Tom," she said.

And it was with the grateful little phrase and the memory of her kiss singing in his heart like the clapper in a bell that Tom went out into the drizzling quiet of the winter street, and turned, with a great wrenching sigh that seemed to affect soul and body, toward the Christmas tree, the noise and gaiety and confusion of his father's home.

A week from tonight, a week from tonight, he would have his fragrant, loving, grave-eyed little wife safe in his arms; little Jean asleep in the next room, and the light of the dying wood fire falling upon the simple plastered walls with their crossbeams of blue-gray eucalyptus wood. And outside the rustling of the pines, and the rhythmic crash and fall of the Pacific on the great rocks below the cliffs.

It was almost midnight when the Cunninghams' big Christmas tree was trimmed, and all the mysterious boxes and packages, little and big, heaped at its foot. Tom, in wild spirits, happier indeed than his mother

could remember his being for months before, had carried away armful after armful of papers and cardboard boxes, and had finally undertaken the adjustment of the strings of electric lights.

Every separate member of the family, except the imprisoned little Paul, who was a sort of royal audience of one for all this display, had dragged forth from hiding places all sorts of plunder, and whispered, giggled, shrieked.

"I've got a horrible thing for you, Aunt Allie. I wanted something, and then I couldn't get what I wanted, and so I took what I could get—oh, wait! I have something else for you, too. That helps."

"Now, listen, Mollie, this may not be what you want, when you open it tomorrow, and if it isn't he said you could change it for any color——"

"Well, when you talk like that if I'm not dying to see it!"

"I'll bet you did see it!"

"No, I didn't—not a thread."

"Mama, I made mine for you, and it's perfectly horrid! Cecy said she'd get me a thing it needed and then she got the wrong thing——"

"It wasn't my fault they didn't have that kind of—you know—any more, Ellen!"

"It'll be lovely, darling. I know I'll love it, that my own girl made me with her own hands!"

"Papa, you know last year you gave all of us bottles of cologne; are you going to give us the same things this year?"

"Never you mind what I'm giving you this year."

"If I guess it will you tell me?"

"Say, we'll need an addition built onto this house, Pop, if much more comes in for Paul. Looky here, this is for the rest of us, and this here, under both these sheets, is all his! He won't be opening packages all day and all night—oh, *no!*"

"Allie, did you use up all the silver thread——? Told you not to give the Baby that, Mart, and now look what you done! A lot of tinselly glass under him, cutting him to pieces! Hold him up there, Papa, till we smooth it off the sheet——"

"Mart'll hold me!" Paul said, jealously. And the little pipestem arms—so thin now!—and the pale little triangular face were pressed close to the ruddy, dirty, tousled glow of the adored brother's splendid health and strength.

"Are you a dirty little liar?" Martin asked, kissing his ear in puppy fashion.

"Yes!" Paul agreed, ecstatically.

"Are you just about good for nothin' on earth?"

"Yes!"

"Are you the sort of rubbish they sweep out of stables and burn?"

"Mart, *don't* ask him horrid things like that! A body'd think you were crazy, and shut you up in a madhouse!" But Mollie's voice was rich with

affection and amusement, as her big, clumsy eighteen-year-old tenderly lowered the wrecked little form back among the shaken pillows.

"Miss Walsh, if you could kindly keep your big hulk off me—— A man was killed in Stanislaus County by having a woman your size fall on him!"

"I do beg your pardon, Tom!" Kate, stumbling against him, was in a gale of laughter as sweet as that of a shaken baby.

"That's right, put your foot in it now! You're a dandy, allow me to be among the first to congratulate you on *that!*"

"Oh, heavens! I've broken the whole thing!"

"Heavenly day, Pete! There go the lights——"

"It's only a short circuit. I'll fix it, if someone will kindly bind Miss Catherine Walsh over meanwhile to keep the peace. It's only this side of the room, Mom——"

"Wouldn't you know, on Christmas Eve——"

"Give me the candles every time," Allie's voice droned in a sort of melancholy triumph.

"Them little electric lights looks very artificial entirely on anybody's Christmas tree; they have an awful Produstant look to them," said the grandmother's sweet, cracked old voice dispassionately. "Little pink and red candles look good, and the Infant Himself hadn't no electric lights, and Him in an ould stable itself——"

"Ah-h-h!" said a dozen voices, as the darkened half of the room flashed into brightness again.

"You're very quiet, Jawn; didn't your dinner set good on you?" Mrs Cunningham asked, in motherly concern. Over John's handsome dark face a smile radiant in its utter content shone suddenly as he said:

"Too happy, maybe."

Nobody else noticed anything, but Catherine Walsh, standing erect and sweet and busy, with both her arms raised to a high branch of the big tree, sent him a glance from her brilliantly shining blue eyes. After a few minutes he found himself some employment in her immediate neighborhood, and they murmured together.

"I'm afraid every minute that I'll give myself away!" Kate breathed, twisting a wire.

"Oh, Kate, can't we tell them! I'll burst if we don't."

"Oh, not yet! I'm all turned 'round, I don't know what to think, myself, yet—much less have them all buzzing!"

"Do you know what I'm afraid of?" He was serious; the olive face was darkened in a very agony of dread, and the sweat came out on his big square hands. "I'm afraid you'll die," he said, choking, and not looking at her, as he draped a string of tiny glass balls in a prettier loop.

"Oh, I love you for that——!" He was to hear the amused, loving, maternal note in the rich voice many times again, many hundreds of times. But he had never heard it before, and a little chill of love's fear, love's agony, swept over him.

"You're so beautiful—I love you so——" he said, trembling. And he had one full look into the glorious blue eyes before an imperious summons called her away.

At half-past eleven the room was all in order, and the tree twinkled at a thousand points in the tempered dark. Martin was left with Paul, and everyone else went off to the Midnight Mass.

It was cold in the streets, but the big church was warm, and pine-scented, and packed with devout hundreds, and organ music was straining sweetly through the candle-lighted great spaces under the lofty roof.

"Oh, holy night, the stars are brightly shining——"

"That's Doctor Stan Richards singin'," Maggie whispered raucously to Allie. "Hasn't he got the grand voice?"

Cecy, kneeling beside her mother, buried her face in her hands. Life bored her; the horrible fact of being bored on Christmas Eve had befallen her! She was disgraced, she would never be the family angel, the spotless little example that was to be held before Ellen again. They had forgiven her the *Mailbag* episode, but life would never, never be the same! Cecy tried to pray, fell into a dream in which the Taylors lost all their money, and was vaguely consoled by the thought of Dion coming humbly to Papa for a job.

Ellen prayed for a wrist-watch, and that Paul would "get well." Mollie prayed fervently for them all; Tom was kneeling there dutifully enough, and all the neighboring pews had reason to see that the eldest Cunningham boy was with the family at early Mass. But Tom was not exactly devout—— Mollie redoubled her prayers.

John Kelly knelt straight and thoughtful in the pew just before her, and next him Grandma, blinking suspiciously at the altar, as if she suspected that the rather youthful celebrant had violently deposed the feeble old Vicar, who was his assistant. And beside Grandma was Robbie's dear Kate, slender and lovely, her crown of loosened chestnut curls spraying up against the old beaver hat that had been Cecy's, her face buried in her hands. Was the child crying? Well, she had a hard life, poor Kate!

Kate was crying. But they were happy tears.

"Oh, my God, make me grateful! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" ran Kate's prayer. "Make me a good wife to him—forgive me all the impatience and badness—when I thought I'd never have what other girls have! Oh, God, bless us both! Don't take him away from me!" She drifted into half-forgotten prayers. "Oh, my God, I love Thee with all my heart—oh, my God, I thank Thee that Thou hast vouchsafed——"

She sat back. Her eyes met John's, behind the chenille and bead decorated cape her grandmother had worn to church for twenty years. A solemn joy irradiated both their faces. John's full heart, his satisfied and yet hungry soul went no further than the hour that would give her to him, slender, young, good, loving, his wife.

Kate saw further, saw wriggling little boys in this pew or some other

pew, a good little girl, in a poke bonnet, next to Mother. Herself flying home. "Did he wake up, Mary? Did he have his bottle?" The Kellys.

They all came out into the dark, as the city rang with the circling notes of bells, overlapping each other, brimming up to the cold, winking stars. "Merry Christmas! How's your mother today?" said voices, on the long flight of stone steps. "Merry Christmas to you all! Well—is it you, Mis' Lacey? Hello, Frank——"

"Merry Christmas, Kate," said John Kelly. Their hands met under cover of gloom and confusion.

"Merry Christmas, dear!" she said.

CHAPTER XVII

On christmas day Tom broke the news of his engagement, and his imminent marriage, to his father and mother.

It was after the hearty two o'clock dinner; the Walshes had gone home. Paul, exhausted with inconceivable felicity, was sound asleep; Ellen was murmuring in her own room with a small friend, who was to wait until Baby awakened, and get something from the Cunninghams' tree. Cecilia, from utter listlessness, had accompanied Aunt Allie to some convent festivity, and Martin was out in the garage, experimenting, under several binding conditions, with the superb new car that had been Peter's gift to his wife. The old car, to use or trade or sell, had been his parents' Christmas gift to Tom.

"He and Kate'll have need of it, God willing," Peter had said.

Tom spoke of the car first, when he came into the big bedroom that had been his mother's for the twenty years of the house's existence. Some of the younger children had been born in this room, and Daisy had died here, on a Christmas Day thirteen years before. Daisy would have been sixteen now.

Tom remembered the little table of medicines and glasses beside the big bed, and that his father had slept upstairs with him while Daisy was ill. Ellen had been the baby then, and such a bad, sickly baby! He remembered the hush upon the house when Daisy died, and himself and Cecilia creeping in to look at the waxen stillness of the tiny face; his mother had been kneeling beside, but not touching, the bed, and Aunt Allie whispering to her.

"Oo—oo—oo, I don't care—don't ask me!" his mother had moaned, not moving even her eyes. But Aunt Allie had whispered again: "I think the little white shoes, Mollie, and the French dress she liked so much—the little angel——"

Today Mollie, dressed only in a short kimono and her sturdy alpaca "balmoral," was lying flat on the bed. Peter, in his shirtsleeves and socks, was sprawled comfortably on the couch that ran at an angle from the direction of the bay window to that of the foot of the bed.

"Pop," began Tom, as they both smiled wearily at him and Peter let the sheets of his newspaper slide to the floor. "That car of yours—of mine, ahem!—is going to come in very handy for me."

Still they smiled sleepily, lovingly. He nerved himself as might a man who picks up a pistol.

"I want to tell you and Mom something, Pop," Tom said. "And first of all I want to tell you that there was a reason for my not mentioning it before this. I'll come to that later. But this is it—I'm in love, I'm engaged, and I want to get married!"

Peter brought his feet to the ground, sat up, his bright little blue eyes on his son.

"Well—no harm in that," he said, slowly, wetting his lips, and with a glance at his wife.

Mollie sat up too, left the bed, walked toward Tom, and sat down in a chair.

"Is it Kate?" she asked, with the room going round her, and her own voice sounding strange.

"Kate!" He was honestly astonished. "No, it's not Kate," Tom said, delighted in spite of various doubts and qualms, to be so far on the hard road. "No, her name is Babette—Babette Newman. She's a very lovely, sweet, good woman I met in Paris. But she's here now, in fact she's a San Francisco girl."

"What—what—what's her name?" Peter asked, vaguely. He was too utterly astonished, he had been taken too entirely at a disadvantage to think or care what he was asking.

Mollie regarded her first-born in stupefaction. What on earth was the child talking about? A—a girl—engaged—her Tom——

"Why wouldn't you tell us?" she asked.

"Well, Mom, there were good reasons. In the first place, she's a very quiet little thing, and then—then, in a way!——"

"You fell in love with her in Paris?" asked his father, in the tone of one who goes to the roots of matters.

"No. Well, I guess I did, but I never told her there. She and the little girl—she has a little girl seven years old—came home after I did."

"She—has a little girl?" Mollie muttered, staring at him.

"Jean. Yes."

"She's a widow, then?"

"She's worse than widowed." Tom had hoped for some sympathy here; but both the simple, middle-aged faces staring at him were devoid of any expression except a sort of horror and fear.

"Divorced, eh?" Peter asked, heavily. And there was a silence. Peter looked at his son, dully, dazedly. Tom looked down at his own big linked hands with a sulky expression. Mollie put the back of one cushiony hand against her mouth, and began to whimper, her terrified eyes looking from one man to the other.

"Well, tell us about it, my boy," Peter commanded then, in a quiet,

measured tone. "You met this lady in Paris. Where's the husband?"

"He's here—in town. I know you'll feel badly about this at first," Tom interrupted himself, in a sort of burst, "but, Pop, when you know her——"

"Go on," Peter said, briefly, with a backward jerk of his bull-like head. "Is she a Catholic?"

"She's a Jewess. Her uncle is a rabbi."

It was said. They knew the worst now. The storm could only break over him. Tom mentally bowed his head to it, and felt some spiritual emotion corresponding to the closing of eyes.

"Oh, no—no—no!" Mollie moaned in the silence. "Oh, my God!"

"It sounds terrible to you, I know," Tom began. He had rehearsed this argument mentally a thousand times. His words came more and more smoothly. "But isn't a lot of it in your own minds?" he went on, trembling but persuasive. "Here is a sweet good girl, devoted to her family and her child, full of goodness and cleverness, and because a fusty lot of old grannies say so, she isn't ever to know what happiness and companionship are again, not if she lives to be ninety! Don't you think yourselves that it's rot? I know what Aunt Allie and Grandma will say —and I don't care! But surely you and Mama won't be bound by that! Babette and I will live our own lives, she's musical, we like the same books and the same plays——"

"You blayguard," Peter said, in a terrible and menacing voice, as he paused, "leave the women of your own family out of this!"

Tom's face, warmed by his own eloquence, darkened, became sullen.

"Oh, certainly, sir!" he answered, bitterly, and was still.

The scene that followed was the most frightful in Mollie's life, perhaps the most terrible in any of their lives. It began with Peter, whose face was dark with congested blood, and whose voice shook with fury, walking up and down, turning with a switch of his stockily built body at the end of each dozen paces, and pouring out upon his son a river of such stinging contempt as Tom had never dreamed him capable of feeling, much less expressing.

Mollie, from a frozen agony of silence, was goaded to protests, little incoherent moans: "Don't call him that—it's Tom, Papa. Tom, for God's sake don't speak that way to your father!"

"You dare to come in here, into your mother's presence, and tell us that everything we done for you in the twenty-five years since you were born is thrown away on you!" Peter said, in the course of his attack. "For months you been coming in here, with your mother and sisters, and makin' love on the sly to this woman who's another man's wife, and the mother of his child! I don't know what her idea of morality is, and I don't care——"

"Be careful what you say about her," Tom interrupted, in a quiet tone, and without leaving his chair, but at white heat. "Or—father or no

father, I'll knock you down for insulting a woman as pure as my mother——"

"You poor fool—you poor fool—they had to get you like all the rest of the poor asses that hasn't sense enough to keep in the road!" Peter muttered, pacing madly, and with a heaving chest. "My God, he walks in here, full of the good food his father's kept him full of since he left his mother's breast——"

"Papa," Mollie pleaded, her teeth chattering, her full, soft face ashen.

"And he's goin' to be married in a few days, if you please, so that the husband can't make trouble—all right, all right! But get out of my house," Peter finished, in a quiet, almost casual voice. "You spit on your mother and your faith and your immortal soul that'll be judged before you're cold in your shroud, and I'll spit on you. You get out of my house, and don't show your grinning face here——"

"Peter, it's Tom, dear!" Mollie was crying bitterly, trying to keep pace with him as he walked up and down. "Don't talk so wild, darlin' heart," she pleaded, with the tears running down her face. "Forgive him, Papa, leave us talk it over calmly, like we always done, when it was somethin' for the children! Don't send him out on Christmas night, dear, the little boy I all but give my life and was anointed for, and him screamin' his little heart out when they thought the both of us was dead! Peter, for God's sake, dear——"

"Don't, Mollie," Peter said, gently. He put her back in her chair, giving her a worried look before he walked up to his son. Tom was standing now, he was taller than his father, and he looked like a young animal, insensate with anger, blindly facing another one. His black hair was tossed in confusion, rumpled when he had buried his head in his hands, under his father's tirade, and his face was white.

"Go back to her, and tell her you've no mother and no father, no faith, no home, and no job, and see what she says!" Peter commanded his son, doggedly.

"You don't think I'm afraid to work for my wife, as you did?" Tom asked, shaking and scornful. "I'll gladly go—and when you send for me, for my mother's sake," he added, with a boyish sob in his beautiful, hurt young voice, "I'll come back. But so help me God I'll never speak to you again, you—— that can make your religion, and the fact that you happen to be my father, your excuse for knifing me, now that I'm down, and need you!"

"Tom," whispered his mother, clutching him desperately, "my darling, my first one, that I prayed for every day since he was born, don't leave me like this, dear! Don't do it, Tom. Wait, lovey. Peter, make him wait—— Leave us talk about it. Why, we'll all be laughin' about it in a few minutes," sobbed Mollie, her mouth twisting and wet with tears. "Look, dear, I'm smilin' now—— Mama's not worried about it, it'll all come right! Peter, if ever I ast you anything in the twenty-six years since you and me stood up in Saint Mary's——"

"He can take his pick betwixt us." Peter, shaking off her hand avoiding her eye, said grimly. "The day he goes to that woman he stops bein' my son!"

"Don't worry. I'll go!" Tom said. He was destined, for a long, long time, to hear the bitter wail that escaped his mother.

But she did not speak again. Tom slammed the door behind him, and there was the silence of death in the room.

Death had been here, too, not many years before. Mollie remembered it, remembered putting away the little bowl in which chopped ice had been kept, the glass from which Daisy had drunk, the woolly white bear. She remembered the suffocation, the iron heaviness of that hour.

But this hour was harder.

She sat still, while the clock ticked and embers broke in the coal fire. Slowly the noise of loud, angry voices died out of the air. Peter breathed in heavy snorting breaths; through the closed doors they could hear the faint, gallant strains of the Victrola—Paul's Christmas Victrola; he must be awake.

In Mollie's windows big evergreen wreaths had been hung: Tom had helped the girls hang them there. Tom!

Ellen rattled the knob, put in an inquisitive head.

"Rita likes the purse and the handkerchiefs, too, Mama. Can I give her both of them? Mama, Tom's upstairs packing—why is he?"

"Never mind run along yes give her both," Mollie said, in a gentle, dead tone, without punctuation.

Peter, disheveled, gray, still red in the face, looked timidly at his wife.

"Maybe if you went up and reasoned with him, Mama?" he asked, in an exhausted voice.

"He'd never listen to me," Mollie answered, weeping afresh.

"Put it to him that he'd much better stay here, and think twict about it," Peter panted, troubled.

"Papa, maybe if you would——?"

"I would not," said Peter Cunningham, grimly.

"He was never one to be drove, like you can drive Mart," Mollie hinted, in the sulphurous silence.

"She's got him on time," Peter mused, out of a deep study. "That's where she's got him. I wouldn't wonder had they it all framed up on the headstrong child. No time to ponder it. No, my lady'll rush him through —that's the way they get them!"

"Maybe if he'd stay home, and think about it, and reason it out within himself, for he's always been a good biddable child," Mollie, who always gave her children such qualities as chanced to fit her argument, said, innocently, forgetting her last remark. "He's one would always be said by you and me, while another would have the heart scalded out of us! I can't believe he'd marry with a poor creature that'd cost him his faith, and forty years old, I don't doubt——"

"Of course he won't! It's all a storm in a teapot," Peter said, as her

voice died forlornly to silence, in a sudden loud tone of relief that poured subtle reassurance into his wife's aching heart. "Why, how can he marry her; he hasn't a cent in the world! Maybe she's just amusin' herself with him while she's waitin' for some rich feller! He has a right to be mad, the way I talked to him, but nothin'll come of the whole thing but talk!"

"But if he might love her?" Mollie offered, fearfully.

"Love?" echoed his father, scornfully. "He don't know what love is! You go upstairs to him, Mollie, and tell him to come to his senses, and that he'll have to have some rhyme and reason in the whole matter before he talks to me about it again!"

Mollie, after a dubious interval, padded duly upstairs, to find Tom grim, white-faced, and packing two ostentatiously displayed suitcases. He was not, however, packing them as rapidly as he might have done, and if Mollie's heart was enormously reassured by finding him still here under the family rooftree at all, it was no less a relief to Tom to realize that he was not to be allowed to go without protest.

Mollie sat down in a big armchair with a deep sigh, panting for breath as she always did when she climbed a flight of stairs, and the conversation began with a note of timid and loving reproof on her side and cold haughtiness on that of Tom.

But Tom had been thinking deeply in the past twenty minutes, and had angrily and reluctantly come to the conclusion that he would gain nothing by a dramatic display of indignation now. Babette was not yet free, there had been complications on her side, and on his it was surely only the most obvious common sense to remain with his parents, and coax them both—good-natured simple folk as he knew them to be—into a recognition of his marriage, at least, a disapproving acceptance of it, if not a consent.

Determined as he was upon the wedding plan he and Babette had so recently discussed, he could not but see the supreme importance of harmony between him and his father. Tom had not a penny of his own in the world. And somehow, in the next few days he must accomplish a complete reconciliation with his father, win his consent to the marriage, obtain a week's holiday, perhaps hint at a raise in salary.

It did not seem too much of an undertaking to Tom, who had been spoiled all his life, but because of the extremely short time the circumstances permitted him, he felt that he must begin at once.

So he allowed his voice to soften by imperceptible degrees, looked angry, then cold, then sulky, then repentant, in carefully graduated changes, and finally kissed his mother, and fell, in a mollified tone, into a long, luxurious talk with her, during which he had an opportunity to speak in glowing terms about Babette; a pleasure for which he had long been hungry.

There was no formal reconciliation with Peter, but Tom, handsome, stern, unusually quiet, was respectful and tacitly docile; and dinner, or rather the heavy cold supper that always followed a big holiday feast,

was accordingly tremulously peaceful. Peter listened to Tom's remarks about the business respectfully, Tom laughed quietly at all his father's jokes, and Mollie was agitatedly satisfied, her heart singing a very pæan of joy and gratitude to God as she served cold ham, stiff raspberry jam, potato salad, and large cups of hot chocolate.

But beneath the surface the deep waters still ran. Tom went to Ross Valley on the following Sunday, and walked with Babette in a wet, dripping, leafy lane. She dared not ask him into her father's house. The news she had for him cut far deeper than anything his parents could say.

"There'll have to be a delay, Tom, dear. For a few weeks—maybe only a week. But I've had to delay the divorce itself a few weeks, Tom, there was no other way! I've talked to my lawyer, old Mr Meyers, who's been so awfully sympathetic and fine through it all, and I've talked to my father—and they both say that if I go into court on Tuesday for my absolute decree, Max will have his own lawyer there to prevent the judge granting it. He'll declare his intention of filing that counter-suit."

She was bundled into the old fur coat he knew so well, her little face looked anxious and worn under a small hat. The road beneath their feet when they came to a crossing, sucked and splashed with mire and mud, and Babette's little shoes were clotted with it.

They walked up and down under a dreary row of shabby locusts, whose last discolored foliage was hanging forlornly to denuded boughs. Matted leaves were thick underfoot, chrysanthemums languished in the bare suburban gardens and sent a sharp, pungent scent into the cool, still winter day. Babette stooped suddenly, and rose with two wet, exquisitely fragrant violets, on long, jointed stems, in her fingers, and held them to Tom's nose.

A soft, enveloping fog was smothering the little town, moving in rounded, stealthy banks in the wet lanes, softening all distance into shifting walls of gray-blue. Into it the blue wood smoke rose from wet roofs, and through it the voices of passers-by came with booming suddenness, and vanished as quickly.

Stiff old dead weeds, milkweed and yarrow, beaded softly with mist, stood against the fences; there had been heavy rains, and emerald grass had sprouted up richly against fence-posts and through the burned pale brown of the dead old grass. Little girls, importantly wheeling their Christmas doll-carriages, came by, lifted bodily, carriages and all, over the muddy crossings by the attendant fathers.

There was a walk, two planks wide, beside the road, and Babette and Tom followed it.

"It's horrible over here, a day like this!" the woman said, shuddering. "Winter in the country is nothing but mud and smoke! We all begin to yawn about eight o'clock, and we usually go off to bed at nine——"

Tom made no answer, and they went on for a moment in silence. Then Tom said suddenly and wretchedly:

"My God, but I'm worried about all this!"

"Oh, I know——" she said, quickly, a faint hint of apology in her tone. "It's awful. I'm so worried, among them all, that I don't know what to do! Mama cries, and my father is furious at me, and you know I haven't any money of my own——"

Money. Tom's young brow darkened. He hated money himself. He would have loved to have her laugh at it, dare everything, lift him on the wave of her own courage. He felt a sort of flatness, despondency descend upon him.

"Money isn't everything," he said, dully. He had a vision of three rooms in the Mission—himself unpacking a basket of butter and eggs and chops, Babette in a blue apron, experimenting with a gas stove—laughter—courage——

"No, but money's extremely important!" she reminded him, sharply.

"I don't think so," Tom muttered, stubbornly.

A quite sensible wave of coldness swept between them.

"Well, anyway, it isn't money now," Babette concluded. "The minute I move, Max does. I could go into town and get my divorce next week——"

"Could?" Tom echoed, forlornly.

"Could if I hadn't promised to wait," Babette said.

"I knew they'd work on you until you promised!" Tom said, bitterly.

Babette's pride was touched.

"They didn't work on me at all," she repeated his phrase sharply. "I'm not a baby! But Max's lawyers saw mine, and he would have filed a counter-suit then and there if I hadn't promised to wait!"

Tom was silent. He was heartsick with disappointment.

"I oughtn't to be walking here with you now, I oughtn't to take *any* chances, Papa says," Babette, her own pain obscurely soothed by the additional stabs to him, added a little primly. Her heart misgave her when he meekly turned back toward the town they had somewhat left behind them.

Tom felt that he had lost her, and his thoughts refused to move beyond the moment of parting that was now so close. Where could he go, what could he do, what was left in life without Babette? To go home—to eat, talk, somehow employ himself? He could not even kiss her, out in this desolate coldness and wetness, wandering along between shabby fences, in the softly moving fog. She was nervously eager to terminate even this much of a meeting, glancing behind her now and then as if she feared detection, more than once suggesting that she might be followed.

"Babette—sweetheart!" he said, trying to recapture the late mood of glorious daring. "Come to town on Tuesday, get your decree, and marry me within the hour! Then it'll all straighten itself out, darling, your people will come 'round, and so will mine, and you won't have to face all this miserable family fuss!"

She conceded him a brief worried smile; the whole scheme, he saw, with suddenly reddened cheeks, appeared to her utterly fantastic.

"No, Tom dear, we can't do that. We must be patient. I'll write you tomorrow, after Papa and I have seen Meyers."

"You don't love me," Tom, pacing at her side, said from the depth of black despair, and after a silence.

"Oh, I do, Tom! But they are driving me almost mad!"

He had presently to let her go, and to see the fur-muffled figure vanish into the gently enclosing fog; Tom made the train and boat-trip home in a deep study, seeing nothing of what went on about him. He reviewed yesterday's telephone conversation that had led to his coming to see her in Ross Valley. Perhaps it had been a mistake. Had her voice sounded cold?

Poor little thing, they were all bullying her and bewildering her, working like the merciless brutes they were upon her devotion to her child! She had said that the delay might be of weeks, it is true, but what were weeks? He must be generous to her.

In a few mere weeks she would be his—she *had* said that. Many a man would thank God humbly for the prospect of such happiness in a few months, a few years—much less a few weeks! Since they loved each other nothing else mattered; Tom heard Joe Riordan, in the office, remark accidentally the next day that he and his wife had been engaged for four years, and felt honestly ashamed of himself.

With a sort of feverish absorption he made himself valuable to his father in the business; stern, interested, tireless, and Peter, watching him with eyes much wiser than Tom dreamed they were, reflected grimly upon the way "the creatures" could suddenly profit by parental precept and advice when their eyes were suddenly opened to the personal profit in such a course.

He and Tom went home together, alluded to business details at dinner, discussed politics as man to man, and laughed at remembered bits of diplomacy or adroitness.

"Going out tonight, Tom?"

"No, sir. Just hanging 'round Ma and the kids."

"If Kate comes over, give us some music, will you?"

"Sure. Did you get me that song, Cecy?"

"It's there on the piano."

A murmuring, happy sort of peace would descend upon the big, homely sitting room, with its rep curtains and books and lamps, its big chairs and tables. Mollie would admonish Ellen, in an undertone; Martin yawn, stretch, drop pencils, roll in his chair; Tom and his father rustle newspapers; and Allie click knitting needles or study the pattern presented upon her darning ball, by the worn heel of a sock.

"Can't you get a book, Cecy?"

"Nothing I specially want to read."

"I hate to see you sitting there with your hands laying idle, dear. Would you like to 'phome, May Cudahy, that she and Leo'd come over, and you'd all have some games, 'Five Hundred' or something?"

"Oh I'm all right, Mama." Cecy's tone would be devoid of any trace of interest or energy.

"There's the new *Rocket* with all about the big ball down the Peninsula in it, and pitchers where they were all dressed up like monks and Spanish girls, and I don't know what all," Allie might tactlessly suggest. Cecilia might merely glance at her, in deep resentment and coldness. Or, if her voice could be safely lowered below the reach of her father's ears, she might say:

"If I can't *have* any good times in my life, at least I don't have to read about the good times other people have!"

"Ellen, you dressing up as a nun, and scaring the hearts out of them at recreation," Mollie's low, half-amused, and half-admonitory voice would continue, as if she were not following closely, and sick with sympathy for Cecy's mood, "what possessed you that you'd do a thing like that? You're getting to be such a big, tall ger'rl now, it's an awful thing if you haven't got good sense——"

Ethel Merry had dropped Cecy as easily and simply as she had dropped a dozen other bosom friends and confidantes of an hour. The instant any particular intimate ceased to feed Ethel's own serene vanity, listen to her in rapt interest, and stimulate her by breathless comment, Ethel was done with her. Dion Taylor Cecy never saw nowadays; Dion lived for pleasure, and his pleasures ran in rapidly followed grooves: tennis with a certain small group, golf with a certain other group, whole days of bridge playing with a third. He was well into his thirties now, and sufficiently spoiled to enjoy a fresh sensation of interest in a fresh face.

"I hope I get a case on one of the girls!" Dion, starting on a yachting trip, would say to his men friends quite simply. His way with women was definite and swift, and he enjoyed all the preliminaries of a fresh love affair like a connoisseur: the glances, the little Monday note with flowers, the tea-times when long murmuring conversation took place in some perfumed drawing room.

Cecy ceaselessly planned an attack upon him, skilfully timed, perhaps helped by some fortunate accident. If she could but meet him casually as on that happy morning in Chinatown, some day when she was looking her best, glance up at him half reproachfully and half laughingly, ask youthfully: "Dion, have I done something to make you cross at me?"—raise the whole thing to the dignity of a lovers' quarrel, everything might yet smooth out beautifully.

She watched anniversaries carefully; it was only two years since they had met, after all. It was only three—four—five months since they had been so happy together, during that last visit with Ethel, after all! Why, only last summer he had come to the Lake, when darling little Paul was so ill, and had been perfectly charming, and made even Tom admit that he was one of the nicest of fellows.

Last summer! Cecy tried to laugh at her own desolate fears and loneliness when she thought of it. A few months ago!

But she had grown older, grown thin and nervous.

"Do you pray about it, Cecy?" her mother asked her, a little shamefacedly one March morning, when she came into the girl's room, as she often did, to discover Cecy lying, tearless and pale, across her big bed, her hands locked behind her head, her dull eyes fixed vaguely upon the plaster scrolls and rosettes of the high ceiling.

"Oh, *pray,* Mama!" Cecilia echoed, sitting up, putting her feet on the floor, and raising her hands to her tumbled hair. Her voice was a mixture of impatience, anger, and utter weariness. "Oh, *dear,"* she went on, frantically and despairingly, "if you and Aunt Allie *only* wouldn't talk to me! If you'd *only*—I don't mean to be rude, Mama, but if you'd *only* leave me alone! There's *nothing* the matter with me, and I'm *all* right, and you only drive me absolutely *crazy* when you talk about it—when you talk as if there *was* anything to talk about, when there absolutely *isn't!"*

And Cecy went to the deep embrasure of a bay window, and stood there crying, and staring with swimming eyes into the dull grayness of the double row of wooden houses that faced the hilly street.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mrs cunningham, perhaps more harassed than she herself realized by Cecy's unfortunate affair, by Tom's incredible infatuation for a woman who was both divorced and a Jewess, and by the constant anguish of watching the feeble, painful, and only partial return to health of her youngest born, accepted the news of Kate's happy engagement to John Kelly in a captious and impatient spirit.

John and Kate walked out to the Mission, to tell the big family, upon a balmy March evening, reaching the Howard Street house just as dinner ended, and sharing the Cunninghams' lavish dessert.

There was laughter, there were kisses and shouts and good wishes and confusion enough to satisfy the most exacting of nieces and cousins, which Kate surely was not, as soon as the news was whispered by Kate herself, into Peter's ear, yet Mollie had small share in them, and Kate instantly noted the omission.

Mollie merely smiled, a smile of infinite superiority, and assumed a somewhat bored, highly incredulous, and amusedly scornful air. Kate saw it, and her own radiant smile faded a trifle, and her cheeks grew hot. Was there anything essentially ridiculous in her becoming engaged to John?

"Well, what do you think of that, Mom?" Tom demanded, when the ecstatically content pair, arms linked, and with John's big shoulder bent protectingly toward Kate's, had gone upon their way, and the Cunninghams were alone again.

"Think of what?" Mollie asked, innocently, with a vague eye.

"Think of what! *Hear* her! Why, of the engagement?"

Surprised at her tone, everyone had turned to look expectantly at Mollie, who now rocked comfortably, while she answered:

"Well, of course I think it's nonsense! Marry? Them two? It's the silliest thing I ever heard in the longest day I ever lived."

"Oh, but what do you say that for, Mama?" Peter, who had a deep respect for her judgment in all such matters, demanded in astonishment.

"Well, because it's so silly!" Mollie assured him, with a sort of gentle impatience. "Robbie's Kate and Jawn Kelly—I never heard the like! Nothin'll come of it."

"Don't you think so, Mama?" Cecilia, not entirely displeased at such an idea, demanded, wide-eyed.

"Your children ain't the only ones that'll ever have anything good come their way, you know, Mollie," Allie reminded her mildly.

"Well, indeed," Mollie answered, flaring quickly, "if they did, I wouldn't thank you for Jawn Kelly, nor ten of him done up in store-paper, as my grandmother used to say! A feller Pete took into the business out of the warm charitable heart he had on him for an orphan that wouldn't have a new pair of shoes from Candlamas to Epiphany, and now me fine lad is stravagin' about and has all the airs of Pat's gander! I wish him well, and Kate too, and where'd *she* be if I hadn't done for her like one of my own, and Pete paid her poor mother's funeral expenses and my brother Robbie's, too, God rest him——"

"Well, Mollie, there's no harm in their takin' a fancy to each other," Peter interposed, mildly, as she fell into a sort of aggrieved sing-song, and the family continued to regard her with astonishment.

"No, and I hope they'll do well, and always remember who gave the both of them their start!" his wife answered, rapidly and acidly, and fell silent.

"Kate said they might be married in the fall, and they mightn't be until after Christmas," Cecilia, with her ideas on the subject somewhat agreeably altered, reported interestedly.

"Christmas!" Mollie, with a brief laugh, and a toss of her head, repeated incredulously, and again was silent. "You'd wonder where they think they're going to get their house and furniture, what with gas and heat and all; and is Kate to walk out on Maggie and her grandmother—that has the force of the rheumatism——"

"Why, you're a lot of old crabs!" Tom interrupted, reproachfully and gaily. "Here's Kate and John in seventh heaven, and you all talking as if some misfortune had come to them! He's a fine fellow and Kate is the most beautiful thing I ever saw, and one of the best, by George, and they're both darned lucky——"

"And nobody said they weren't," Mollie reminded them, sharply, "and if Kate can settle it with her conscience to desert her grandmother, that

took care er when she was a little helpless baby, and if Jawn Kelly thinks he afford to support a wife, and perhaps lend a hand with my poor bro when sickness or shortness of work makes times hard, well and goo issed her and I wished her well, and if she comes to see me I'll be g see her, and there's an end to it. I done for her what I hope God w nd someone to do for my own, and the thanks I get is that she wa on us, and flaunts her engagement in our faces, and it's 'Oh, we're ppy!' and 'I never guessed he loved me!' and all the rest of it, an ver a young feller that may have a job tomorrow and may not!"

"As job goes," Peter said, in a somewhat sobered and a patient tone re wrong there, Mama. Jawn's in the firm now, you know."

"Then, the more fools them that let him in!" Mollie answered, brie There's a thousand engagements every year, and here Kate's onl more of them, and that's enough of it!"

ubject, much to the family's bewilderment, was accordingly dr and a certain doubt of the wisdom of the affair crept into what- ey s subsequently said of it. Kate and John Kelly—why, how could K t married? And where would John be if it wasn't for Papa?

e, having magnificently established this attitude in her own house- ent to see her mother and sister, and spread the doctrine, on the ng day.

ll you ask them about Kate?" Allie asked her, before she left, and answered, indifferently:

'll if I think of it."

both she and Allie knew that she was going for no other purpose, Mrs Walsh, when her prosperous, well-married daughter came o kitchen, as she did almost every two or three days, knew exactly x on for coming, too.

N was devoted to her old mother, and the two families enjoyed an ns interest in each other's concerns. Today she found her enjoy- ee-o'clock cup of strong tea at the kitchen table. The dark spring s streaming with rain, and there was gray twilight in the cluttered, s kitchen.

llo, Mollie," her mother greeted her, in her soft minor accents. "I feel like nothin' at lunch," she added, explanatorily, with a glance glazed brown teapot, "and when Mag went out I thought I'd have of tea—Harry's layin' down in there," she interrupted herself, jerk of her head in the general direction of the bedrooms; "he felt bad—Charley said it was somethin' he et over to Daly's——"

for goodness' sakes!" Mollie commented, mildly regretful, as er voice died peacefully away into silence. "You look well, Ma," led, affectionately.

last was purely formal, for old Mrs Walsh, garbed in dingy black nd further wrapped in a small crocheted shoulder cape of purple

and black, had not altered in appearance for twenty . Her small wrinkled face was of the color and contour of a walnr bright old eyes were oyster-gray, her crinkly thin hair grizzled and

"I'm doin' good," she conceded. "I had the rheumat ery strong on me, but savin' your presence, didn't he give me som that made me sweat very profuse——"

She brooded over her cup. Mrs Cunningham rocked c tably.

"Would you like the lights, the way it wouldn't be so g re?"

"Oh, not for me!"

"Well, tell me," said Mrs Walsh, after a silence, "h the child today?"

"The child" was always Paul, nowadays. His mother sigh she gave a cheerful account of him.

"He's very resigned to his cross, God love 'um," his granc r commented, sadly. "There was a fam'ly lived near me father's in the old country," she added, musingly, "that had a young boy o years that had a great trile come upon him. Such a stren'th of we come over him that he cuddent put fut to the ground. 'Mama!' he'd come carry Bernie!' That was his name—Bernie. 'Bernie can't wall lore!' he'd say, and she with her face like a curd itself, runnin' up t him up, and pack him about wherever he'd be. Well, she had an aun was a nun in Donegal, and didn't that one dream, in a quare sort eam one night, that it was a blessin' sint to thim, that they'd be dra rer to God, with the sore trile it was to have the young boy s on thim——"

"Well, indeed I often think that of Paul," Mollie agreed, in e, and with another long sigh. "Maybe Peter and I were too prou e whole set of them, though indeed God knows when I lost my littl , that'd be sixteen now, there was small pride in me then! I thou never smile again!"

Silence, while the rain slashed and streamed, and smoke came dc crazy little cottage chimney in acrid puffs, and cleared away again.

"Where's Maggie?" Mollie presently asked.

"She was havin' all the throuble there is in it with the Gayley dress," her mother reported. "Didn't she make the two sleeves s the child, and scorch them with the flat when she len'thened thi run out to see could she match the stuff—can she do it I don't What's Tom doin'?"

"Pete says he's working very good," Mollie answered, with he bosom once more rising and falling suddenly. "But he says the like one that has a fever upon him——"

"Whativer possest him that he'd run after a woman like tha grandmother mused. "He that cud have had his pick and choice!"

So far, no mention of Kate. Both women were warily avoic subject. To bring it up was to lose a point. Mollie could not be eff scoffing until her mother had been betrayed into effusiveness;

Walsh could not hope to combat any criticism or lack of enthusiasm on Mollie's part, if she had first been indiscreetly exultant.

The rain hammered down, the roof spattered and dripped. Mrs Walsh shook the teapot, looked into it with a sharp old eye, drew her crocheted cape about her shriveled little shoulders, and sniffed. She dragged toward her, from a chair, a worn old black silk bag that looked like a miniature collapsed balloon. The contents of this bag had never been revealed, but the family knew that it contained knitting and darning, and the accessories of each, small boxes and bottles of pills, newspaper clippings and flower seeds, scissors, spectacles, large rumpled handkerchiefs, rosary beads, silk rags, old cravats, twisted little striped paper bags of hoarhound and lemon drops, odd documents regarding taxes or assessments, and black-edged "death cards."

The bag was never quite out of its mistress's reach. Today she clawed knowingly, and without glancing down, within its depths, and brought forth a crochet needle and a ball of white string, with which she proceeded on the work of a scalloped washcloth. Mollie, heavy and rustling in silk, rocked thoughtfully, and for a while the fall of the rain and the creaking of the rocker were the only sounds heard in the kitchen.

The floor, chipped and splintery, was dark with age and the stains of spilled liquids and grease. The rusty, heat-distorted stove drifted gray ashes, and was flanked by a large grocery box stuffed with newspapers, kindling, odd lumps of coal, and the casually flung sweepings of the floor. Empty cereal and egg boxes and tin cans, emptied too, but still wearing their bright dress of pictured tomatoes and peaches, surmounted the fuel.

The table was covered with a red cloth, somewhat rumpled and crumby, and set with odd cups, sugar-bowl, teapot, and a large plate of cut bread. Butter, strong and freckled with white flecks of salt, was on a blue saucer. Kate's best waist, clean and frilly, was hanging on a hanger behind the stove. Beyond the window and a strip of dripping porch were neighboring backyards, and the back of the big stable in Ellis Street, all caught today in a gray curtain of rain.

The sink was a tangle of dishpan and spattered dishes, the loosened soot from burned pots drifting in flakes upon the gray, cool water. Maggie, coming in from the street, mentioned it apologetically.

"Mollie, I wondered would you be here! Didn't I make the sleeves of the Gayley child's dress two full inches short, and then after I'd pieced it, what'd I do but scorch it?" Maggie demanded, with a wet, breathless, and wholly affectionate kiss. "I've been all day on it—I declare I got all worked up over it! I had to run half over town to match it, and now I'll be up to midnight makin' the sleeves all over again. And me with a terrible headache when I woke up this morning, and tomorrow Sunday, when I can't sew a stitch, and Mrs Gayley very high-spoken over it, when she 'phomed, and askin' me what there was about a child's dress that made such a touse——"

And Maggie sat down, in one of her rare moods of high spirits. Mollie knew that her sister was often stimulated by mischances into a sort of desperate good humor, but it was not that today. Today she was pleased about Kate's engagement.

"I'll get at the dishes as soon as I've my good skirt off," Maggie planned, stretching her hand for the teapot. She also looked into it, rose, jumbled a handful of paper into the stove, and scraped a match on the rusty old iron plates.

"How's Paul?" she asked, at the sink, with the water shrieking into the hot, empty kettle. "A cup of tea is going to taste real good to me," she admitted, as she sat down again, cutting off small bits of bread, slapping against them half their bulk in butter, and chewing the result thoughtfully. "Have some tea, Mollie?"

"Well, maybe I will," Mollie conceded.

The conversation rambled. They talked of the neighbors, of an expected engagement, an expected baby, an expected death.

"How's Kate?" Mollie asked then, driven to it.

"Well, what do you think of Kate's news?" Maggie could then ask, triumphantly. Mollie looked amused, pursed her mouth, shrugged.

"Well, I don't think I'd talk about it yet awhile, Mag. It seems to me early days for talk——"

"Talk never hur'rt nobody yet," put in the old lady, briskly, after a somewhat strained pause. "There was a feller in the old country, and what'd he do but marry a ger'rl that was deef, and so dumb you'd never get a word out of her! 'Oh,' he says, to all the neighbors that'd wonder at him, with a good little farm, and his sister married, that wouldn't do betther for himself than to take a deef and dumb ger'rl that'd never pass you the time of day——" She fell silent, watching both daughters shrewdly.

"But what's the matter with their being engaged, Mollie?" Maggie demanded, astonished. And the real conversation of the day was begun

When Kate came in, an hour later, fresh and blooming, with her hair curled into what her grandmother called little fish-hooks and cloverleaves with the rain, decent gloom held the kitchen.

Kate dispelled the physical dusk by a brisk flashing on of lights and tied a gray, limp apron about her slender straightness, to attack the dish pan. But to influence the mental and moral dubiousness that had fallen upon her elders was another matter.

It was pointed out to her that while it was all very nice and sweet that she should be engaged to Jawn Kelly, it wasn't as if she was a ger'rl without responsibilities. Of course she'd marry him some day, but it was nonsense to be talking of autumn, or Christmas, "as if there was nothing to it but put your arm in his, and run off to the priest like an Ayrab," as her grandmother expressed it.

There was her salary, to begin with, every penny needed to keep the household afloat. And then there was her help in the kitchen and bed

rooms, when her grandmother was ill, or Maggie under a pressure of work. And her poor uncles, what about them? Certainly it would kill Maggie to do everything that had to be done about the cottage, and Mollie was loyal and heated in protesting that her old mother was not to be overburdened in her age with household duties.

Kate, the bloom and glory suddenly departed from her like a falling garment, went doggedly on with the work of dish-washing. She swashed hot suds, rubbed, wiped, piled; went to and fro between sink and cupboard, laden with hot clean china. She brushed the stove with an old turkey wing already pretty well worn down to the quills, and shook the red tablecloth on the wet porch. Her face grew dark.

"Yes, but do you think it's fair for me to have to give up all my life, Aunt Mollie?" she demanded, in a slightly thickened voice, when her homely task was done, still standing at the sink, but facing the room. "It isn't *my* fault that Uncle Charley and Uncle——"

She stopped, proud and angry, her throat thick.

"No, dear," Mollie assured her, lovingly and eagerly. "Indeed it's not your fault! But look at your poor Aunt Maggie here, Kate, who was engaged to Frank Cahill. She had to give up *her* life, and a blessed and wonderful opportunity it was for her——"

"I don't see it," Kate said, stubbornly. "Frank Cahill died!"

"Well, you couldn't expect any blessing to follow a girl who turned her back upon those that raised her, Kate," Mollie argued, patiently, as Maggie, shocked at this allusion, began to cry. "You had no mother and father to do for you, like Uncle Pete and me do for the children. If Maggie and Grandma——"

"So I'm to let John Kelly go," Kate suggested, bitterly; "the man I love—and who loves me——"

"No, *dear,*" Mollie supplied eagerly, distressed; "be engaged to him all you want to! But I'd make up my mind to a long engagement, that's all. When Harry's better, and Charley gets work again, then it'll all be different. Or maybe Maggie might go in working with somebody like Miss Donovan, who has so many to sew for——"

Kate, wiping the already well-wiped sink-board with a rag, looked mutinous. Her breast rose and fell stormily, but she made no further protest.

"By all means consider yourself engaged!" Mollie advised. She felt a prick of compunction, leaving the cottage just as one of her utterly inefficient brothers lumbered in, to catch the glint of a tear in Kate's proud eyes.

She did not know herself exactly why the thought of Kate's engagement to John Kelly galled her. But it was jealousy, pure and simple. Jealousy for Cecy, who was not engaged; jealousy for Tom, who was so unhappily in love; jealousy of the first marriage, which should have been among the ranks of her own children, and in the big house.

And jealousy deeper than this personal jealousy. The envy of the

stout middle-aged woman for the young and exquisite one, the envy of the wife and mother who has loved her rank, for the fragrant, mystified girl who is to be initiated into all these wonders.

Kate, Robbie's little orphaned Kate, would be the wife of Peter's young partner. Kate's young hand bound with a gold ring, Kate a wife, Kate seriously considering data, counting on her rapping fingers to nine. Kate bearing a first child—that muffled, heart-shaking, wailing baby whose coming means that a woman is born, too.

The thought of this stung and writhed in Mollie's heart. She could be neither reasonable nor generous to Kate. All the glory and happiness seemed to have gone out of her own magnificence and achievement, and to be transferred to this insignificant niece. What with Paul crippled, Cecy disconsolate, and Tom involved with the sort of woman Mollie imagined Babette Newman to be, there was small pleasure in the contemplation of her own group.

And to have Kate so radiantly queening it over them all! No; Mollie had been generosity itself to Kate, up to this point. But this was too much.

"We'll have her talking of presents, and a house, and a trip, and clothes, and dear knows what all, and I'll not stand it!" Mollie thought, resentfully. "I'm not going to have Cecy holding the umbrella over Robbie's Kate!"

And Mollie was the family dictator. Nobody questioned her decisions, and even Peter was won so quickly to her point of view that he talked seriously to Jawn about it.

"I wouldn't move too quick, Jawn," he warned his young partner, reluctantly. "It isn't only money—my wife and I have sent her mother money every month since we were married, I guess you know that. But they really need the ger'rl; she's the backbone and stay of them all, Maggie and the old lady, and them poor brothers of my wife's—— I don't know what they'd ever do without Kate!"

John's face grew stony, but he made no protest. After all, the only person whose opinion mattered was that of his glorious Kate, the sweet, gay, radiant girl whose youth and joy were being hammered down by these gray, merciless seniors. If Kate would defy them, they were helpless. And if Kate would not they might as well chatter.

After the exquisite delight of the understanding that had existed between Kate and himself since Christmas Eve, this cold discussion, this drab, middle-aged publicity was bitterly hard to face. He and Kate had had some hours of inexpressible felicity, in the grimy, dim old Library, or walking the gray winter streets, or, on one or two memorable occasions, talking over some little restaurant table.

Their love had been enough, then. There had not even been talk of marriage in the ecstasy of discovering all the new world of their likes and dislikes, their hopes and dreams, their feeling for each other. Mar-

iage loomed golden and indistinct somewhere in the unbelievably won-erful future, but they could not get beyond the radiant present now.

John, for so many years silent, an outsider, alone, had developed en-irely new qualities. He often made Kate laugh, her ringing delicious augh with the unexpected deep notes of a shaken baby's laugh in it, and he loved his laugh in return, reluctant, brief, with the quality of sur-rise.

"We'll have to have a little house, Kate."

"Oh, don't!"

"And you'll be Mrs Kelly—that's a swell name for you! How will ou like that?"

"Good gracious! I never thought of that!"

"You'll have cards with 'Mrs John Rose Kelly' on them. My mother's ame was Mary Rose."

"Oh, John, don't! You scare the senses out of me!"

And she would take the conversation back to the mere happy hour; he delight of love confessed, the inexhaustible thrill of awakening assion.

Mollie's attitude, so arbitrarily taken, poisoned all this. Kate's bloom faded, and she grew harassed and anxious again. John became stern nd ugly.

"I'm surprised that you'd let people like your Aunt Maggie and your uncles, who have made an absolute failure of everything they ever put heir hand to, influence you in a thing like this," John said, bitterly.

"Aunt Mollie isn't a failure!"

"No, your Aunt Mollie married a good man, and a darned smart man, nd they've made good. And consequently she thinks that she can run the whole family."

"I'm not being influenced by them entirely," Kate reasoned, walking beside him in the Sunday sweetness of the Park. "But I have to think it out for myself, and I'm not sure but what they're right. As they say, it means only my happiness—not even that, but it means my *immediate* happiness against that of four other people. We're young, and they're not, and a curse might follow us if——"

"Oh, a curse!" poor John echoed, desperately. "Leave it to them to make you think that marrying the man you love would bring a curse down on you! You can go on slaving at the Library, washing dishes and carrying in coffee to your uncles, and there'll be a curse on you if you ever try to get out!"

The summary chilled and frightened Kate in her secret heart, but she answered sturdily:

"John, if a thing is for other people, and hard to do, isn't it pretty sure to be right?"

"Of course you can always say that."

The bitterness of death was upon her, and under it the strange sweet passion for martyrdom that runs in Irish blood. She was paler, thinner,

quieter, more beautiful than ever in these days; she bore her cross heroically and without complaint.

"Kate, don't you realize—can't you *see?*—that hundreds of lives have been wrecked because of some such old grannies interfering?"

"I know that it isn't always easy to do the right thing, John, and that hundreds of lives are wrecked because people, especially people in love, have been selfish!"

"Well, when it's too late, you'll see it!"

A smile from the shadowed eyes beneath the flowery new hat.

"You mean you'll fall in love with somebody else?"

"No, I don't mean anything of the kind! You know it, too. But to shut me up every time I speak of setting a date, and to refuse to let me tell people we're engaged, and to put me off even when I try to kiss you—it'd kill anything!" John said with a break in his voice. "We're eating our hearts out, this way, and when I think of years of it, it makes me —— My God, how smug they are, how easy they do it! I want my wife, and my home——"

She had turned ashen white; she walked along at his side without speaking.

"Maybe it won't be so very long, dear," she said, in a sick voice, after a while.

Their meetings grew sober; they were engaged, of course. They would wait for each other, of course. Time wouldn't make any difference, of course.

But meanwhile, there were Kate's grandmother and uncles to think about, and poor Maggie who had quite convinced herself by this time that she had given up Frank Cahill voluntarily, and Uncle Peter who had practically supported the household on Turk Street for dear knows how many years, you couldn't expect him to do more than he was doing. In a little while, if Grandma kept well, and Uncle Harry didn't lose his new job, and Charley got something to do, why then it would all be different. But just now——

So John met Kate in the Library, and they talked soberly and with quiet deep sympathy and understanding, and John walked home with her, and sat by the sink while she washed the dishes, and they told each other that God, who had brought them together, surely would not try them beyond their strength.

"If it was only the money, Kate, we could live on half of what I'm getting," John would argue, wistfully, wiping a plate by the masculine method of laying it face downward on the table and rubbing its back.

"It isn't only money," she always answered, bravely. "It's that my uncles are always getting into trouble, and nobody ever keeps any accounts here, and never will, and they don't know from one week's end to another what they have, or what they spend. It'd be a constant trial to you, John, never sure what would break loose the minute I left them. But never mind, it won't last for ever!"

CHAPTER XIX

It was the pretty custom of Jean Newman, seven years old, to end each of her meals with a trip to her mother's side, and a smothering hug for Babette. She was a serious little creature, demure and even a trifle reserved; she hung her head before strangers, and was persistently silent, even, when the fancy seized her, with her young uncles and her grandparents. But she was passionately demonstrative with her mother.

Jean was slender, with a mane of rich dark hair falling about her flushed, shy, baby face, and little socked and slippered feet that moved with a sort of fairy lightness. No matter what the occasion or what the company, she would leave her chair, circle the table, and fling herself into her mother's arms when her silver bowl had been duly emptied or her silver plate cleared.

And Babette would strain the elusive, delicate little armful to her heart in an agony of mother love. The little bones that felt as if they might be so easily crushed, the fragrant, firm, cool baby flesh, the brushed hair that smelled so deliciously of soap and sunshine and fresh air she seemed actually to inhale, in the seconds that found Jean in her arms.

She always put Jean to bed at night, an enchanting ceremonial of games and ablutions. Jean, her scarlet little mouth bubbling clean tooth-paste, talked eagerly to her mother. Jean, before her brown little gipsy legs were inserted into the pink and blue frogged pajamas, was kissed between her baby shoulders, and on the soft little bunched backs of her legs, and on the clean soles of her feet, by her mother.

Boodle, the white bear, was kissed, too. Babette knew well the taste of his hairy, clothy nose. And Jean always, in winter, said warningly, "Leave a crack!"

So the door, in the dark months, was duly left open just a tiny crack. But in summer, especially if they were at Grandfather's big Ross Valley house, Jean went to bed in balmy daylight, and the night had no terrors for her.

At Grandfather's she slept on a porch, and could hear the grown-ups, Aunt Sarah, who was twenty, and was engaged, and Uncle George, who was twenty-two, and Uncle Sidney who was older and had girls, laughing and running about on the tennis court below. She could hear the kitchen door slam lightly, and the two Chinese servants laughing as they rattled tins. She could smell honeysuckle, and dry bay and pepper leaves, and watered lawns.

Jean told her mother that she liked Grandfather's house the best in all the world. Better than Paris or Normandy? Oh, yes, Mummy! Not better than the big, clean ship, where the kind man took them down to see the cakes being made? Oh, yes, Mummy, better than that.

Babette, hearing the asseverations in the passionate little voice, sens-

ing the truth of them through every hour of the child's sheltered happy day, sighed deeply—great sighs that seemed to tear at her soul. This was an ideal environment for little Jean, it had been Babette's own environment through a happy, sheltered childhood, too, and she loved it with all the loyalty of the girl who has left home too soon, and who comes back to its peace and love sadder and wiser, able at last to appreciate it truly.

If on any one of these fragrant, throbbing early summer days, when the whole countryside was splashed with color and fragrance, blotted with golden light and golden shadows, she applied duly for her divorce, she ended all association with her mother's home as if it had never been.

The divorce they might forgive her. But the immediate marriage with a man as foreign to their world and their circle as Irish Tom Cunningham they never would forgive. She would go out of her father's house for ever when she went to that marriage, and what was harder to think of, her little girl would leave this happy place for ever, too.

To Babette's father and mother there was no idea of compromise. They were not compromising persons by nature. Babette, understanding Tom because she loved him, knew well that Tom's people were quickly angry, quickly reconciled, quick to forget. But her parents were logical, proud. When they said that she must choose between this ridiculous infatuation for a man of a different religion, different group, entirely different upbringing and outlook, and themselves—the father and mother to whom she owed life and everything in life—they meant it.

They stated their position, and nothing more was said. Nothing direct, at least, was said. They were very tender with their daughter during the strange spring days, days of drenching green rains and exquisite blue days, and the family ties were imperceptibly tightened on all sides. But there was no open campaign.

Aunt Bertha, the redoubtable Mrs Napthaly with whom Babette's husband made his home, came to Ross Valley now and then, bringing toys to Jean and one or two handsome presents to Babette. Cousins came in, chattering of family matters. Max Newman was quietly, regretfully, praised. Pity he hadn't taken this turn for the better, this respectable and prosperous turn, earlier! the cousins said sympathetically. Babette's brothers and sister made much of the baby Jean; harmony and love reigned in the comfortable, beautiful house.

Babette walked through the days like a woman in a dream. Before her sober eyes the scales balanced—balanced eternally.

On the one side, Tom. Handsome, Irish, devoted, with that rich catch in his voice that made a little corresponding catch come in her breath. Tom, so pathetic, so endearing a mixture of boyish bravado and manlike devotion——

She would have a little house with Tom. Both their families hostile, and cut out of their lives—not that families mattered!

Or did they matter? Were family ties as strong as love? Perhaps sometimes they were, when a dear little soft girl, wistful and helpless,

was concerned. Jean in a little apartment, with a stepfather. Babette and Tom walking in the Park, on Sunday afternoons, with Jean between them.

But no longer the hilarious arrival at the Ross Valley house on Friday afternoons, where Uncle George would catch the child up for a run in his roadster, where Grandma smiled from the hallway where she was settling sprawling brick and gold and brown velvet nasturtiums in a clear glass bowl.

No longer a servant carrying "Miss Babette's" bags upstairs to the big chintzy, shadowy room with the oak boughs spreading outside the awninged windows. No; an apartment somewhere in the city, and Tom Cunningham.

Babette would stare at his picture, the handsome, smiling face would seem absolutely unreal to her—seem to represent nothing.

The life of the house went on. Sally, her sister, had visiting girl friends on Saturday afternoons, laughter echoed about the place, and the tinkling of ukuleles. George, Babette's brother, lounged about in white flannels, smoking, yawning, discussing golf clubs. The gold sunlight of early summer fell steadily upon the rounded tops of the oaks, upon the velvet lawns, upon stretched awnings and the twinkling black of the motor-cars. And Babette wandered through it all, dreaming, pondering, often faintly frowning.

Max Newman wanted her to forgive him, to try again. She knew, even though they never voiced the thought, that her father—her mother —wanted her to give Max another trial. Sally, curling her heavy black hair, remarked briefly that Babette was awful mean if she didn't at least see poor Max.

Little Jean would fret, would be lonely, in the small establishment Tom Cunningham could maintain. And then suppose Max came after the child and carried her off to Mama and Aunt Bertha again? And suppose that Babette, her resistance weakened by sheer confusion and discouragement, presently conceded, as so many other divorced mothers had come to concede, that "for the child's sake" the best place for her was no longer beside her mother? Her heart turned sick at the thought. Babette was a clever woman, and she knew that the instant she married Tom Cunningham all the pressure that Jean's father and her own parents could bring to bear would be sprung in full force upon her. The child herself would be won away by the memories of these happy days at Grandfather's, by the promise of a pony or a tricycle.

And Babette would be a bride, occupied with all the readjustment of the first married months—occupied, it was extremely possible, with pressing financial cares, if Tom's father, even for a time, really kept his threat of dismissing and disowning him. And then suppose her health——

She felt almost mad with the constant agonizing pressure of her own thoughts. It seemed impossible for her to decide. In the back of her heart

and mind she reiterated, or rather held fixedly to an unworded decision that of course she would marry Tom, and that, in no case, would a reconciliation with Max be even considerable. But all plans involving Tom had a way of becoming alarmingly hazy when she was away from him, and on the rare occasions when they met she was surprised to find herself captious, cruelly disappointed, fretted by love and doubt, and more thoroughly unsettled than ever.

One June morning, after the exchange of several distressed letters, he came to Ross Valley to see her.

It was a still, exquisite morning, bathed in soft warm sunlight. There had been an early fog; thin wisps of it still clung in the cañons and drifted high in the tops of the redwoods. The dew lingered still, in the shade, and the dry air was sweet with tarweed and burned Indian grass.

Babette was pale and quiet. She had no joy in this interview; she had been lying awake through the short, warm, moon-flooded night. Max—Tom—Max—Tom, had moved through her thoughts. And at dawn she had come suddenly, with all the force of a spiritual conviction, to her decision.

Quietly, on a great wave of pain and of awakening, she had seen what she must do. No convert, facing a hostile world in the flame of a new faith, ever had undergone a more definite experience than did Babette, as she turned exhausted, beaten, on her pillow, and sank into deep, peaceful sleep, just as the day crept into her mother's garden.

She would not get her divorce and marry Tom. She would not escape with her child to Paris and make her own living shopping with American tourists. She would not continue the present half-life, moping about her father's house between wifehood and girlhood, wretchedly tied yet wretchedly alone.

But sadly, with dignity, and for her child's sake, she would consent to try Max again. The exulting whisper would run through the ranks of the family; cousins and aunts, warmly approving, would come in to see pale, silent Babette, who had forgiven her husband unforgivable wrongs.

On the one side—Tom, and all the triumphant disapproval of the family if life with Tom went wrong, if Jean suffered, if it proved a mistake.

On the other hand—everything: their approval, their gifts, the grateful, passionate admiration. French hats again, bright with velvet poppies melting into velvet straws, new frocks, every word attended, every mood studied. Max would be humble—servile. Babette would have her own car, now, her furs—her trips——

Her lips curled. Max in recent letters had begged her just to try him—just to come back to him, not as his wife, he would never expect that again, but as his honored and adored friend—his sister——!

"Well," thought Babette, gritting her teeth, and on a stormy breath, "he'll get what he asks for! I'll do it—I'll go back to him—let him take

me to New York, keep the surface smooth—for my baby's sake! But I'll never have another happy minute, and I'll never be his wife again!"

The morning had become warmer. Her mother's garden—Mrs Garberg was a simple, quiet woman, who lived for her garden—was rich with color and scent on the still June morning. Blue shafts of delphinium caught the light; masses of yellow daisies; verbena in every shade of lavender and pink, purple and dead white; humble brilliant marigolds and sturdy gillyflowers shared the bright blots of sunshine and shade. Along the edge of the lawn, border pinks swooned in toppling fringes of bloom; fragrant syringa, clean in deep green and creamy white rose in rounded bushes, and the first of the foxgloves stood forth like candles against the dark background of the wood.

All so regulated, so ordered, blazing window boxes, striped awnings, the grass-cutter clicking, the water-sprayers flinging diamonds into the air. The garage was set in ranks of bloom; clean shadows fell blue upon raked gravel walks. And indoors there were jars and bowls of flowers reflecting themselves in polished surfaces, white-clad Chinese dusting furniture and baking rolls, table-linen, glassware, all the comfortable beauty of a luxurious home.

The brown linen gown Babette wore, as she walked slowly through all the peace and beauty of it to the side gate, was another note in the utter luxury of it all.

Jean was playing in her sandpile, with a neighbor's child, another sweet curly-headed little girl with bare knees and healthily tanned round cheeks. Jean and Alice—they would not be separated.

"I do it for her!" Babette thought. Tom could say nothing to that argument, and she need use no other.

She waited at the field gate back of the empty stable, and presently Tom, driving the car that had become his only as long ago as last Christmas, came along the old road. He looked at her eagerly; he was pale, and wore an anxious air. A great smile of relief lighted his handsome face as she smiled and climbed in beside him, packing her thin linen skirts tightly about her as she sat down.

"God! I've been thinking all the way, if you weren't standing there—back of the stable——!"

Babette smiled again, sadly, tenderly. They went on and on, into sweet open country, without further words.

The roadside grass was already brown and dry and slippery; the encircling hills as tawny as crouching leopards. Even in June the hay was cocked, piled fearlessly in the fields that no water would touch until Thanksgiving.

They passed little brown cottages, with climbing roses on the wire fences, and babies in faded rompers digging in the gardens. Eucalyptus and oaks shaded the rambling country road; the orchards were in heavy leaf, and burdened with golden apricots and the bright vermilion enamel of cherries.

The car rumbled over a sunken bridge white with powdery dust, passed primitive camps where spattered cars were parked under oaks, and where girls in khaki breeches were idling at bare pine camp tables. Babette said to herself: "Half-past eleven. At one I will be having lunch with the family, and it will all be over!"

They had left houses and camps behind them, and were up in the foothills now. With a quick twist Tom brought the car to a standstill under a great group of roadside oaks. Behind them rose the sharp spur of Tamalpais, dim and dreaming, ultramarine against the paler sky; below, the wooded slopes fell away to the marshes that were threaded with shining canals, and the massed spikes of the distant shipping, and the blue glitter of the cities—San Francisco, Berkeley, Oakland—about the irregular circle of the bay.

For a moment they sat silent, their eyes upon the panorama below them. Babette was wondering how she should begin. Tom saw that she was tired and nervous, and feared any bungling on his part.

"What's the news, dear?" he asked, gently, after a while.

"Oh, news—?" she echoed, wearily. "What news could there be? It's —deadlock."

"Don't say that, dear," Tom begged her, infinitely distressed. "There are times like this in all our lives——"

"Why," Babette demanded, with a note of passion, a note of breaking, in her voice, "why can't people be kind? Your people—my people! Why do they have to *torture* us so!"

"Because we haven't the courage to shake ourselves free of them," Tom answered, steadily, after a pause.

"Oh, Tom, it's not that!" she answered, impatiently. "No amount of courage would free Jean if her father chose to fight for her!"

"Dearest," Tom said, "how you let them worry you! How could he fight for her?"

"Ah," Babette sighed, dropping her head on his shoulder, and resting against him like a limp and weary bird, "you don't know him! I wish"—she added, dreamily—"I wish I could just stay here for ever, with your arm about me——"

There was a long silence. She had taken off her hat, and Tom kissed the soft waves of her dark hair.

"Tom, aren't they cruel to force a mother—through her child?"

"Cruel! But they aren't forcing you, dear, they're only trying to!"

Babette thought that perhaps she would face them all down, after all. He was young now, but Tom Cunningham would be a husband to be proud of, some day.

"If only I had your courage, Tom! But they threaten to take Jean away——"

"On the evidence of a servant!"

"Well—she has notes—I wrote you that——"

"Damn her and her notes!" Tom exclaimed, heartily. "All you have to do is say that Newman himself practically deserted you——"

"Oh, Tom, but it's all dreadful. The publicity—the awful shadow on Jean——"

They were silent again, Babette's thoughtful eyes on the widespread landscape that was swimming with all the beauty of early summer, Tom's eyes upon her face.

"Max sent word through my aunt that he wanted to take Jean to the circus next week," Babette presently said, slowly.

"Nerve!" Tom commented, disgustedly.

"Nerve, yes. But they all thought I ought to consent."

"They didn't take that tone awhile back!" Tom reminded her.

"No, but they're all back of him now. My Aunt Bertha said that you couldn't blame a man for wanting his own baby girl——"

She was silent a long time. Then she sighed deeply and said:

"Oh, if something would only *end* it!"

Tom made no remark, and after a moment Babette went on:

"You see, it means giving up everything, Tom. My father and mother, Jean perhaps—everything——"

"Well, for me, too," he reminded her, with a rueful smile.

"Ah, but they're Irish," she said, wistfully, "they'd forgive you!"

"They might forgive me," Tom conceded, slowly. "But nothing would ever make them think I was married. I would be excommunicated—they would think my soul lost, and while our marriage went on think of me as 'living in sin.' That's the—delightful phrase, for it. You can imagine the effect upon my mother, and that there wouldn't be much intercourse between the two families!"

He looked down at the thoughtful face upon his shoulder with a grim, brief smile, and Babette raised her troubled eyes for a half smile in return.

"Oh, dear!" she breathed, returning her gaze to the countryside again. And she knew that she would never let him do that. No, she had the excuse, first and foremost, of going back to her husband for her child's sake; and secondly, she could not wreck Tom's life.

"Tom, dear, promise me this. That whatever I decide, whatever I'm driven to—you'll know I acted for the best?" she murmured.

"Ah, my darling, how can you tease me so? Don't speak as if there could be any way out of it but one!" Tom pleaded, close to her ear.

"I get so discouraged, Tom——"

She ended the interview upon that note: weariness, doubt, wistfulness. She promised, when he put her down at the old stable gate again, that she would write him.

And write him she did, only a few days later. Max, humble, tender, eager, was with her when she mailed the letter. He and Babette were crossing the broad Embarcadero at the ferry, coming from Ross Valley, on their way to Oakland, when Babette stopped at a green mail-box, and

put up her immaculate white glove, and slipped the letter under the metal flap.

In Oakland their Pullman drawing room, on the long Overland train, awaited them. Max had been summoned to a convention in Atlantic City. Babette was accompanying him. Her family, loving and united once more, accompanied her to the train. Babette wore a new pongee suit, a gauze veil wreathed her smart little traveling hat. She was quiet, sweet with a new sweetness, her dark eyes were sad.

Her father gave her a check "to buy pretties in New York." Her mother clung to her, whispering: "You won't ever be sorry you made Mama so happy, dear." Sidney, Sally, George, looked new respect for her; all the cousins and aunts were devoted.

And Babette, in her humbled and martyred, heart, was deeply and mysteriously happy.

CHAPTER XX

Tom cunningham found the letter propped up on his bureau the next evening. Her slanting, tall handwriting gave him a little sense of vertigo; he never could see Babette's handwriting unmoved. His big hand shook as he took the letter, dropped into a chair, ripped open the envelope deliberately. Here it was—in his hands—the letter she had promised him—the thing he had been living for——

There were pages—pages. Tom felt an instinctive bewilderment, holding them. Usually she was so brief——

The letter began:

Tom, my dearest, when you read this I will be once more with my husband—with Jean's father. It is only for her sake. Max Newman is leaving for the East today, and I go with him, to be gone for several weeks. Believe me——

"Oh, my God—my God—my God!" Tom said, in a loud whisper, with long pauses between the words. He sat fixed, the crumpled sheets convulsedly held in his big hands. "Oh, my God!" he said in a loud whisper again. "Oh, Babette—my little girl—they didn't get you, after all?"

Then for a long time he did not move.

Some time later he went quietly down the back stairway and out of the side door into the dusky summer street, where furtive gritty breezes were stirring. One of the maids reported to Mollie that Mr Tom had gone out, and Mollie looked vaguely surprised and distressed.

"Is it late, then?" she asked, rousing herself from the dreamy state to which a fairy tale, read aloud by Ellen to Paul, had reduced her.

"Soup's on the table, Mommy," said Peter. "Did you say Tom went out, Annie?"

"Yes, sir. He just went by Lizzie and I," Annie reported. "Lizzie was rollin' the little butter balls——"

"Well, come on, he'll be back," Mollie said, comfortably.

But it was many a long day before Tom came back.

Kate, however, saw him an hour or two later. She was just closing the Library, after a singularly quiet evening, when she jumped nervously to discover her cousin standing near her and staring at her with peculiar bright, glittering eyes in an ashen face.

"Scare you?" Tom asked, hoarsely, after clearing his throat, and with an attempt at a smile.

"No, but what is it? Somebody sick?" the girl asked, quickly.

"Everything fine," he answered. "I just wanted to speak to you. Closing up?"

Kate, instead of responding, rapidly disposed of a lingering reader or two, jerked off the dangling lights between the grimy bookcases, made a brief survey of the storeroom, where the kettle had been known to burn dry overnight, over a forgotten gas jet, slammed blotters and pencils into her desk drawer, and put on her hat.

Tom meanwhile stood at the big street window, looking out. When she touched his arm he started, and they went out together, Kate locking the door behind her.

"Tommy darling, what is it?" she pleaded then, terrified by his aspect.

He seized her arm; walked her rapidly and blindly ahead. He was breathing strangely, and Kate caught an odor about him that she had never detected on Tom before. Something wild, disordered, something for which she confusedly found the word "coarse" frightened and puzzled her in his manner.

"Listen," he said, convulsedly, "I'll tell you! Listen a minute——"

He suffocated. Kate was hurried along beside him.

"Tom, where have you been? What have you been doing?"

"I've been walking—I don't know where. I've just been—walking," he said, quickly and unevenly, in a loud, breezy voice. "Kate," he said, breathlessly, "I've had a letter from her, and she says she's gone back to her husband. I don't believe it. I don't believe it for a minute, so *that's* all right. But—but—but here, you read it," he broke off, feverishly jumbling some crumpled sheets of paper into Kate's hand in the darkness of the streets; "you'll see that she just wrote it to scare me—they made her, they're all after her. He wants the kid, do you see, Kate? That's all she cares about—she'd seen him in hell before she—— I know *that,* she's told me that a thousand times!—— Oh, my God, my God, my God!" he cried, in a sort of terrified wail, covering his eyes with a quick gesture of the back of his hand. "I'm kind of knocked in the head, Kate," he added, in a quiet, reassuring voice, catching her arm once more, and hurrying her along. "You'll have to excuse me. The husband is a beast—a low Jew, that's what he is—everyone knows that. She could no more go back to him than you could. I *know* it! But you see I telephoned her father's

house, and they said she wasn't there. Probably out with her brother—George Garberg; he's a nice kid. And then I telephoned—I telephoned to the husband, Max Newman. He lives with an aunt of his, a Mrs Napthaly, and she said that he'd gone East, 'with Mrs Newman.' So you see—he's married again. I'll bet you any money, Kate, I'll bet a thousand dollars to one that it isn't Babette—— Listen, Kate, *listen,* Kate——"

"Tom, dear, you're all worked up about it, and you're not well," Kate said, tenderly. "Try to be reasonable, dear. You didn't have any dinner, did you?"

"They've all gotten at her, and scared her about Jean," Tom said, quietly, quite without hearing her. "If I'd been there, it never would have happened. Now where are we? Pierce and O'Farrell. Where's the nearest telephone station? I'll try her again, and if it's a possible thing, I'll take the nine-forty-five boat to Ross. It'll all be cleared up. What I meant to say to you was this, Kate. Don't let my father and mother, and all the—— Oh, damn them, damn them!—They talked her out of it!" he interrupted himself, on a great dry sob. "Don't let my father and mother talk you and John out of it," he went on, suddenly rational and confidential again. "They will, you know. Older people—they have no guts. It's all a question of rent and religion with them!"

"Tom, will you come back with me to your house, and just lie down—you'll be ill—you *are* ill——"

"She hasn't done it, because she wouldn't let that skunk put a fingertip on her, much less—" Tom said, his mouth suddenly dry—"much less shut herself up in a hotel room with him. Her little suitcase—her little things—oh, my God! There's the cemetery. Lord, what bright moonlight on those old eucalyptus," he observed, conversationally, once more suddenly collecting himself, "which way are we going? No, she hasn't done it," he repeated, "but if she has, it's my father's doing, and of course I'll kill myself."

"Tom, what a silly, schoolboy way to talk!" But Kate was quivering from head to foot.

"Do you think I could live, knowing that he had her, Kate? Going in and out of her room, watching her pour his coffee—— You must be a good deal of a fool if you do! I opened the letter—I thought it would say something about plans—— Here we are. I'll join you in a minute——"

They were indeed in sight of the Turk Street cottage. Kate caught at his arm.

"But come in, Tom—— Ah, please! There's nobody home but Grandma. Uncle Harry's got a night-watchman's job, and John left yesterday for Los Angeles. Aunt Maggie's making Cecy a dress, and she said if she got working late she'd stay and have dinner with your mother."

"I'll come back in five minutes." He detached her hold on his arm, lifted his hat with an air, and walked rapidly away. Kate stood at the gate.

"Tom!" she called, suddenly, fearfully. She took a quick step after him, turned back.

Let him walk it off. Poor, frantic, desperate Tom, exercise and fatigue would do more for him than any words of hers could do. She went soberly into the house.

CHAPTER XXI

TEN DAYS LATER Kate told her aunt that she and John were planning a quiet wedding in September.

Mollie listened apathetically; she was not concerned in Kate's plans now. She had been ill, was up again, and could go to church, could move heavily, sadly, about the big, shaded house.

In Paul's room there were toys, blocks, story books. Ellen still played with him, alert eyes on her mother; Martin's ingenuity with "Holy Joe" was exercised tirelessly, but in lowered tones. There were strange silences in the house; it seemed empty, haunted. Somtimes Allie's and Mollie's voices, droning in the upstairs rooms, sounded oddly like sobbing.

The stricken mother drooped visibly before their eyes. When Peter, himself suddenly aged and gray, agreed with the doctor that the Lake was the place for them all, Mollie consented dully to move. But she took no part in the preparations.

Her beautiful Daisy's death had been laid as an offering at God's feet, as had the death of that shadowy baby who preceded Daisy. Tom's absence in Paris she had borne. Cecy's unfortunate love affair had been weathered. Paul's cruel accident, shaking her philosophy and faith to their roots, was nevertheless now a part of life, a cross, a "trile," with at least no bitterness and no ugliness about it.

But the complete disappearance of her first-born child touched her reason. The supposition was that Tom had shipped on some seagoing vessel, and was halfway to Australia or China now. But all Peter's cautious investigating unearthed no proof. Tom was gone.

His mother was unable to rally from the blow. She carried her heart like a bleeding thing in her breast, and dragged from the innermost depths of her being great hitching sighs that tore at her physically, before she could bring herself to utter even one of the lifeless brevities that were her only conversation in these days.

"What did you say, dear?"

"Oh, Mama, darling! If you knew how we are all praying about it!" It might be Cecy weeping, embracing her, interrupting her languid progress from one room to another. "Tom's a big, strong man, Mama—nothing can happen to him! For Papa's sake, for *all* our sakes, *can't* you just trust in God?"

In vain. Mollie would brush the comforter aside. There was no solace anywhere. But Cecy had mysteriously found her own soul again, won by

suffering and sympathy, and was once more her father's angelic little guide, and a very example of holiness and sweetness.

Cecy was to be Kate's bridesmaid. The engagement had been duly printed under "Other Social Events" in the newspapers, and Kate wore a ring. Aunt Mollie, Aunt Maggie, the uncles, had all quite enthusiastically accepted their part of the plan; Kate, after her agonies of renunciation, was bewildered almost to the point of resentment at their adaptability.

"You'd think they'd never made a scene when I talked about getting married last spring!" she said to John.

"Well, exactly," John answered, shrugging. "Do a thing, and everyone admires you. Give it up, and pretty soon they are all despising you."

Dark days for Mollie and Peter, lonely and heroic ones for Cecy, yet these were exquisite times for John and Kate.

The girl lived in a dream. Her destiny seemed to be brilliant to the point of unreality. For *her*—shabby, hard-working, dish-washing Kate Walsh!—the new frocks, the new hats, the new trunk with its pleasant reedy smell, the new cards with the engraved new name, the sun-flooded apartment in Van Ness Avenue, far down near the military post on the bay. These were all so much bewildering glory added to the central fact: that this big, strong, gentle man loved her, wanted to make her his wife, always—for ever and for ever, to be near her. That he could kiss her now, could press her head back, and rest his face against hers, and grip her in his forceful arms while he whispered: "Kate, do you love me?"

Hundreds of men were marrying hundreds of women every year. Why should this one union seem fraught with such heart-stopping miracles? Why should Kate almost suffocate when she thought of the wedding morning, the Mass, the breakfast, the hour when she and John should go off into the autumn sunshine together? Mr and Mrs John Rose Kelly. They would go to Del Monte, and it would be so written upon the register: Mr and Mrs John Rose Kelly. A bell-boy would carry their suitcases upstairs——

"I'll have a wedding breakfast for you, Kate," Mollie promised her, drearily.

"Oh, Aunt Mollie—you don't want to! We can——"

"No, no, what's the big house for? My own don't use it. It isn't good enough for Cecy and Tom!" Mollie pursued, bitterly, wearily. "Only don't have too many, dear."

"Oh, darling!" Kate was kissing her. "Nobody but ourselves!"

"What an idea!" Mollie roused herself to say, with heavy gentle reproach. "No, dear, say forty or fifty."

"Forty or fifty!" Kate's beautiful blue eyes flashed with excitement. "Oh, but, Aunt Mollie, could Lizzie—would you have to have extra maids in?"

"What do you think we'd have to do? Isn't there such a thing as

caterers?" Mollie demanded, with a pale echo of her old superbness. Kate and Allie exchanged impressed glances. Caterers!

"Leave her do it, she's grievin' her heart out for Tom, and it'll distract her," Allie said to Kate, later. "I never see anybody mourn the way Mollie'll do. I said to your Aunt Maggie that I don't know what more'd be left to her, if his dead body should be brought home dead to her, the way she acts about Tom! Grief takes her terrible hard, for all she'll rarely let a sound out of her. She's like poor old Mrs Moore when her son come back that was killed in the Klondike—didn't he walk in on her five years after all the Masses they'd had said for his soul—for he was very wild, without being what you'd call vicious in any ways whatsoever ——" rambled Allie. "And she as cool as kiss your hand!" she concluded, obscurely, "and all she says was, 'Shut the door behind you, Joe.' I thought Alice Moore would drop on me when she told me."

The return from the Lake was early this year, and the entire family forces rallied in the big Cunningham house in Howard Street for Kate's wedding. It was going to be such a simple wedding, and yet, as the months narrowed to weeks, and the weeks to days, there seemed to be such overwhelming details to settle.

This was perhaps partly because nobody did anything completely, or with anything like dispatch or finality. Maggie was to speak to the priest, and forgot all about it. Mollie was to have a long talk with the caterer, and kept putting it off. Allie was supposedly superintending the modest trousseau, and Allie's dilatoriness was proverbial.

Boxes arrived. Kate and Cecy, in their petticoats, and fresh from the endless trying-on of half-made clothes, flew excitedly out into the upper hall, and interrogated the maids, as the boxes were carried upstairs.

"Who's it for, Aggie?"

"It's for Miss Kate, from Schonwasser's."

"Oh, that's the collars, Cecy! Thanks, Aggie."

"Kate!" Maggie would call, from the big room next to Paul's that was used as a sewing room now. "Come back here while I see will this lay good on your shoulders!"

"Katie!" That was Paul's high, imperious little voice. "Let me see! What was it?"

"It was nothing for you, lover. Or wait—we did get him something, didn't we, Cecy! It was a box for perfume, and we thought it would make a fine quilted little bed for Holy Joe!"

The sewing room was a litter of scraps, lengths of embroidery, fashion books, half-finished garments.

"I suppose if I had any sense I'd make this an elastic belt in your good dress. God knows where you'll be this time six months! Stand still, Kate, or the blade'll run into you——"

"Look at her blush!"

"Blush? It would make a horse blush!"

"That wrinkle will come out when it's pressed. It fits good now, don't it, Mollie?"

"Ain't any of you going to have any lunch? Lizzie says it was ready, dear knows how long back. Leave your hair go, Maggie, and come down like you are. It's just us."

"Did you speak to Uncle Peter about asking the Crowleys, Aunt Mollie?"

"What did you say, dear?"

"You know we weren't sure about the Crowleys."

Kate kept lists, everyone kept lists. People to thank for presents, people to ask to the wedding, other people to be bidden to the house; flowers, palms—remember to bring suitcase to Aunt Mollie's house before wedding.

"Stamps," Kate said, seriously, to John, on the eve of the great day. He had found one of her lists, and was consulting it with her.

"You darling!" he muttered, laughing and confused. "What for?"

"Well!" She had turned scarlet. "They said they mightn't have them for sale at the hotels—and I'll have to write letters——"

"Oh, you *darling!* Kate, if only you don't die before tomorrow, my dearest." His arms were about her, he was gently tumbling the beautiful golden-brown ripple of her hair. "Kate, dearest, do you love me?"

She said "yes," laughing. She had been laughing all day, in the desperate last whirl. The house was decorated now, and the church chancel set with palms and flowers. Music had been "arranged." The Fallons, forgotten until the last minute, had been pacified. Mollie's dress was on a hanger, Grandma's new dress had been carried home to her, Allie and Maggie were wearing their eyes out, nervously plunging through the last stages of Cecy's and Kate's dresses.

Some things were packed, some were still unfinished. Kate was not supposed to see John at all today, and there they were talking downstairs in the hall.

"They might as well stay to dinner, I suppose, since they're here?" Peter suggested, and Cecy, hating to lose one minute of Kate, added eagerly: "It's just a pick-up dinner, Mama, and Annie says it's ready any time."

"No, I don't like that," Mollie said, wearily and anxiously. "She ought to have gone earlier, she was to have her last supper quietly at home with Grandma."

"Aunt Maggie needed her for fitting!" contributed Ellen.

"Never mind then, Mama, Jawn'll take her home," Peter assured his wife, soothingly.

"No; that won't do either," Mollie persisted, fretfully. "She oughtn't to see Jawn at all today. I don't know what's come to the girls, the way they run around with no modesty at all to them! Her and him were fixing the flowers——"

"The Haleys are here, just to see her presents, and they'll take her

home," Cecy interposed, diplomatically. "And it isn't as if it was anything but a little wedding, Mama—just a breakfast really."

"The first wedding in the house, Pete, and my boy—that I would have give my life for——" Mollie faltered, in tears.

Kate, approaching to bid them a weary, grateful, excited, confused good-night, saw that the moment was inopportune, and departed.

"Say, Kate, come in and have breakfast with us tomorrow!" Mart called after her, from the confusion of step-ladder and greens in which he labored.

She paused, radiant, young, weary, all girl in her laughter, and yet all woman in the swift look that met John's eyes before it went to Mart.

"Well, I will if I *can*——" she hesitated. "But I have a date at nine o'clock!"

The Haleys, two good middle-aged sisters who had a millinery store in Fillmore Street, were delighted to escort her home, and make the kindly duty an excuse for stepping in to visit old Mrs Walsh, upon the very eve of the great occasion. Kate stopped on her way, this last night of her girlhood, to buy fresh spongy bread at the grocery, and figs, and a can of corn.

The Angelus was ringing through the mellow autumn dusk when they came to the dingy kitchen. After the windy, chilly summer, a little interval of peace and warmth had come to the gray city, and the steady apricot glow in the west promised Kate a golden wedding day. Her own long shadow went before her over the splintered door-sill across which she had taken her first staggering baby steps into the big world.

Her grandmother was in the kitchen, crooning like an old sorceress over the preparation of coffee and eggs for Harry. Harry had a night-watchman's job at the moment, and consequently slept all afternoon. Mrs Walsh, and Maggie too, had a perverse fancy for twilight, for puttering about with straining eyes and inaccurate fingers in the dusk, and Kate's first move tonight, as usually, was to flash on the lights.

An aged friend of her grandmother, the Widow Regan, was now discovered sitting quietly by the table, her dingy veil falling ineffectually about a florid, square, weather-beaten old face, and the worn alpaca that clothed her enormous form embellished by a large china miniature of a Murillo Madonna, in the shape of a brooch.

Kate, as the other four women all peacefully seated themselves and regarded her amiably, began to snap strings, to rattle pans, and jerk faucets on and off. The conversation began with greetings.

"Well, Hannah," said old Mrs Walsh, repressively, to the elder Haley. "Well, Annie."

"Well, Kate," said Mrs Regan.

"Where's Maggie?" demanded Maggie's mother. "She has a right to fix his supper for Harry."

"She's finishing up my wedding dress, I'll have you know, Mrs Walsh!" sang, rather than said, Kate.

"So you're goin' to lose your good name, Kate, as they say," Mrs Regan contributed, in a deep male voice. "That's what my own good mother always used to say. 'Well, you're goin' to lose your good name,' she'd say to this one and that."

"Well, I get a dandy!" Kate, pulling the kettle forward, and slamming stove plates, returned cheerfully. "Kelly. Can you beat it? John says that whenever he's in a strange town and wants to talk to somebody he walks to the nearest clergy-house and asks, 'Is my cousin Father Kelly in?'"

"I didn't know he had a cousin that was a priest, did you, Annie?" asked the elder Haley, innocently.

"Pure bone, fortified with the best Portland cement," Kate commented, affectionately, laying her glowing cheek for an instant against Hannah Haley's grizzled, wrinkled, freckled brow.

"My sister married a man named Kelly, and wasn't she wed and out of the house before I was born at all?" Mrs Regan said. "There was a fine old lady come to the marriage, and she says to my poor mother, God rest her, 'She'll have the weddin' of a duchess,' she says, 'and the death of a saint!' Manny's the time my ould mother's tolt me of it; it was a week to the day that I was born. 'And you kickin' the life and all out of me,' she'd say, savin' your presence, ger'rls, 'the way I thought you'd be born in the house before I could get home!'

"An' my sister Moira, that was married that Easter Monda'," she continued, "had the consumption come on her wit' the stren'th of the very serious sickness that was in it, after her second one come, an' it was death touched her, an' well she knew it! And I two years old at her funeral, yellin' that my mother'd give me some barley sticks they had there to pacify the young little children. Two infants she left behind her —that one."

"There's manny goes that way, with the consumption on them," Mrs Walsh commented, in a dreamy silence.

"Mrs Regan, how do you have it?" Kate asked, at the teapot.

"Are you fixin' a cup of tea for me, dear? Put a taste of sugar in it, Kate, and a sup of milk. God bless us, I ought to of been home this hour back! But you know Mamie's in the hospital——"

"Mamie is?" It was one of the Haleys questioning. The Haleys liked to know everything about everybody, and never missed a crumb of information. For months, selling seven-dollar hats, putting crookedly lettered signs "Choice, $2.50" in their dusty little shop window, they would murmur about the night before Kate Walsh married John Kelly, when old Mrs Regan was over to Walshes'.

"Mamie had a miss yesterday morning, and they run her into the hospital, and they don't know will she live or not," Mamie's grandmother enlarged, dispassionately.

"Mamie Riley?"

"Oh, my, she was terrible ill with the sickness that took her," the harsh old voice continued. "They anointed her for death, but she didn't die on

them, and tonight Willie come in, lookin' like a corpse that'd sit up in the casket itself, and he says she had a chanct that maybe she'll live. I was just tellin' Mrs Walsh."

"For the love of Mike!" Hannah Haley whispered, shocked. "Did her mother come up from Santa Cruz?"

"Kitty? Yes, she's here. She left Benedict—that's her third boy, that's pushin' twenty now, with the arm he bruk crankin' Joe's car—all done up in a boondle as big as a watermelon or what not," Mrs Regan said.

"And Mamie sick in the hospital——" Hannah mused. "My, ain't it terrible what children cost people!"

"Oh, they're a heartscald from the day your clothes begins to feel tight on you," the great-grandmother, eighty years old, stated, dispassionately. "Mamie have two, an' yet not twenty-four, and Willie says she's bawlin' the hear'rt out of her that she'd lose this little unborn one that hasn't ever come yet!"

The peaceful sipping of tea followed. Kate ate little, drank the hot thin drink gratefully, dreamed of tomorrow. Behind her confused thoughts of invitations, of all the engagements and obligations of the day, floated always the glimmer of the wedding gown, the perfectly practical and simple white silk, "that she can wear to rags afterwards," Maggie reiterated, that was yet so sumptuous when offset by the white shoes and stockings, the collar of real lace that belonged to Kate's shadowy, long-dead mother, and Aunt Mollie's delicate white veil. Then real orange blossoms, fragrant, stocky, thick little creamy-yellow blooms whose waves of oily perfume would always mean to her the September day of her wedding. These to be in rosettes at the temples. And delicate, fresh underthings of palest pink, even the new stays, all run cunningly with faintly pinker ribbons. And the new suitcase, and within it the new blue taffeta wrapper embellished with little ruffles, and tiny pink roses, and crinkled rows of creamy lace. "In case you'd have breakfast upstairs in your room," Mollie had murmured as if casually, bringing the scarlet to Kate's face and making her heart hammer with happy fear.

Some of these things were laid out neatly in her room, that shabby cottage room that she had shared with Aunt Maggie all her happy, sunny, impetuous life. Others were at Aunt Mollie's. The characteristic detail of Aunt Maggie still slaving, late into the actual wedding eve, upon the wedding garment, entirely escaped Kate. It had never occurred to her that Aunt Maggie was responsible for the chronic last-moment hurrying and straining.

Harry, nicely shaved and brushed, came into the kitchen for a hurried meal, and went importantly upon his way. If he possibly could manage it he would be at the church the next morning at nine o'clock to see Kate married, he promised. "But business first," Harry said.

"I feel sorry for the men," Hannah Haley, who did more honest work every week than Harry had ever done in his life, commented, admiringly. "You don't drink tea, Mr Walsh?"

"Sometimes," Harry answered, condescendingly. "But you can't go to sleep on my job!"

Kate, who had interrupted her own desultory meal to prepare and serve his, put the eggy plates and pans to soak, and reseated herself when he was gone. Her dreams went on, through the quiet conversation of her elders. She saw John, tall, dark, pale under his summer brown, standing at the end of the long aisle, against the background of lighted altar and the drooping fingers of the palms, waiting for his wife——

"Who's standin' up with Jawn?" Mrs Regan suddenly demanded, setting down the saucer from which she had just enjoyed a luxurious draught.

"Joe Prendergast—Doctor Joe, it is now!"

"Them Prendergasts have been the unfortunate ones," Mrs Regan commented, shaking her head. "Nine, she had—and three tuk away in the coorse of two years! Lily's baby was born the night Dan died, and they said that Minnie sat wit' the tears drippin' into the face of the poor young boy, that wasn't an hour old, and the face of him like lard itself. Lily has poor-lookin' children, but sure they all grow up as har'rd as heathens. 'Oh,' she says, but very whisht, mind you, that Lily wouldn't hear her, and have a convulsion on them like Rita done. 'Oh,' she says to the poor infant, 'there's life and death in this house tonight!' she says."

"Speaking of Rita reminds me of Rita Malotti, that married the Eyetalian—you remember the girl that lived in Chico that I was telling you me and Annie made all the clothes for when she got married?" Hannah Haley contributed. "Didn't she have twins at the Caseys' awhile back. She run over to see Grandma Casey, and Mrs Casey says, 'Rita, what do you want for Christmas?' It seems it was Christmas Eve. Well, Daisy Casey was there, and she's a great one for humor, she's as comical as a bag of monkeys, and she give Rita a look, and she says, 'I think she wants a calendar—looks to me as if she has no business out of her own house just now!' and with that Daisy laughed. Well, it seems that Malotti, the Eyetalian she married, come in just then—her mother was staying with them, and she sent him over to Caseys' to bring Rita home—and he says, 'I'm fired. *I've* got to get a job for Christmas!' And Daisy says that Rita stood up, and she looked kind of queer, and wasn't the twins born that very night, in Grandma Casey's own bed.

"And oh she's having a terrible time with the both of them," the narrator continued, sighing. "There's one has the rickets, and the doctor says that if that one dies, as like as not the other one will, too. And the older child, the girl, is a very delicate creature."

A silence. Kate piled cups, thrust wood in under the cooling kettle stood listening at the sink.

"I suppose poor Tom Cunningham would of stood up wit' Jawn Kelly if he'd been here," Annie Haley ventured.

"John said so. I think it's just one more blow to my Aunt Mollie.'

"Poor Mollie, them children has been a terrible heartscald to her. Pau

a cripple, and Ellen as wild as a hawk," summarized Mrs Regan, "and the priests writin' her twice that they'd fire Mart out of their school, for the wildness of insubordination that's on him, and then Tom walkin' out! And Cecilia, that was goin' to be a nun; whatever happened that she lost her vocation, and begun to run with them society people? Don't I remember the mother, Mollie,'" the old woman continued, "the night before she was married to Pete Cunningham, that was makin' five hundred a month, they said. My, the pretty, happy ger'rl she was—she looked somethin' like Katie here, before she begun to put on flesh. But Kate's hands and feet is bigger. And the next time I come to this house," she added, impressively, "the good man himself was laid out dead in that room Maggie and Kate has now. My daughter Kitty have his death-card to this day—I seen it when her grandchild dropped everything out of her prayerbook last Sunday at eight o'clock. The whole pew was full of holy pictures and death-cards."

Kate was winding the dimmed nickel alarm clock.

"Grandma, shall I set it for seven? Uncle Pete is to send the car for you and Aunt Maggie and me at half-past eight, and there won't be any breakfast fuss. We'll all be fasting. Half-past seven will be early enough, won't it?"

"You can't wait to get into his ar'rms, can you, Kate?" Mrs Regan commented, good-humoredly. "This time tomorrow night we'll not be hearin' so much out of you!" she predicted, with a shrewd smiling glance.

The three elderly virgins, for Maggie had come in now, with the wedding dress in a large cardboard box, laughed a little self-consciously at this, and Kate turned her back squarely upon the room, and devoted herself to the dishpan. The very lobes of her ears, close-set under the loosened chestnut rings of hair, turned pink in the scarlet flood of color that enveloped her.

She swashed the mud-colored rag conscientiously about the discolored tin pie-pans and the nicked cups; rinsed the glazed brown teapot that was sometimes washed but never empty; disappeared into the backyard to rap the rim of a laden saucepan against the disreputable garbage barrel; put away clean china, still hot and smooth to the touch; jiggled the matches back into their paper box; brushed the floor.

And all the time, under the drifting talk of marriage, birth, and death, the exquisite dream floated before her eyes, the vision of the white gown that could be worn to rags afterwards; the blue taffeta wrapper that a wife might wear, should she and her husband breakfast upstairs; the nightgown so delicately embroidered and frail; the new trunk with its good clean odor of varnish and new wood, and the church aisle where a darkly glowing, tremblingly reverent young man would be waiting for his wife at nine o'clock tomorrow morning.

"We'll see you tomorrow, Kate, but you won't see us," said the Haleys, at about half-past nine, making half-hearted preparations for departure. The Haleys had said this to every bride who ever bought a wedding hat

of them. They were going to the church, of course, but they appreciated perfectly that they did not as friends rank quite intimately enough to be further bidden to the house. "Meanwhile, we'll run up to church here and say a little prayer for you."

"You'll be angels if you will!" Kate responded, gratefully, kissing them.

But still the elderly women lingered talking. Kate pondered as she fussed and rinsed, half listening, half smiling. She was going to be married tomorrow. She was going to be married tomorrow.

Catherine Walsh Kelly. She had told John that she never picked up a newspaper in the morning without seeing that some unfortunate Kate Kelly had been arrested for drunkenness or disturbing the peace, but she liked her new name none the less. She would be Mrs Kelly.

It was wonderful to be young, and going to be married! Kate, soberly washing dishes, would not have changed places with any woman in the world tonight. She felt a great pity and love in her heart for these other women, unmarried women, widows, elderly women for whom all the glory and flash and glow of life was ended.

Her hands smelled of dish-water, coffee grounds. She went to the wash-room, off the back porch, and returned with a slip of perfumed soap and a brush, still listening to the others, as she scrubbed and soaped busily under the hot-water tap.

"'I never seen a corpse with a nose-bleed in all the days of me life before!'" Mrs Regan was quoting some physician solemnly. "'Well, doctor,' she says, 'a nose-bleed he has, and that's the long and short of it!' An' wit' that, Nelly run——"

"For heaven's sakes——" Maggie murmured, impressed.

"Well, Mamie Cotrelly's child was delivered, and she dead——" one of the Haleys added, in a low tone, with a cautious glance at Kate's back.

Kate fell to vague thoughts of motherhood. How did one know it was approaching? Was the agony so frightful? Was there a real danger of a bride's immediately becoming a delicate, handicapped burden? Did men stop loving women if sickness and little babies and nerves and helpless-ness began too soon? She mused, a little apprehensive, but all curious, all eager for life. Could a few weeks or months actually make Kate Walsh anything less than the sound, healthy, vitally living and radiant creature that she was tonight?

"Well, we'll see you in the morning, but you won't see us, Kate," said Annie Haley. It was just then, as the three callers were actually about to go, that a large soft bundle fell, or was propelled against the outer kitchen door, where three chipped and splintering steps led down to the yard, and that a thick voice was heard saying: "You leave me be, and I'll leave *you* be!"

Mrs Walsh gave a thin little familiar wail, and a look of sudden intelligence leaped into Maggie's eyes. Kate set her teeth, put her arms akimbo, and made a tutting sound with her tongue.

"Oh, and he said he'd surely be all right for my wedding!" she lamented, less angry and surprised than simply regretful.

"We'll slip out the front way!" whispered the visitors, entirely comprehending and lightly stepping into the front hall.

"Oh, my—my—my, it's Charley, they've got him again, just as he was workin' so good!" muttered Mrs Walsh. "Turn his bed down, Maggie, and come here, Kate, and lend me the loan of a hand with the poor feller!"

"I'll start him some coffee," Kate said. She did not see the heavy form she presently helped to push and pull into the bedroom, she did not smell the evil breath, or feel the clutch of the hot, misdirected hands.

The world for her was all blue taffeta, white satin, filmy veils, and fragrant orange blossoms. In spirit she was at the church, in the cool sweetness and silence of a dreaming September morning. She was following the pink organdie and poke bonnet that was Cecy, she was tightening her white-gloved hand upon the comforting solid arm of kindly, fatherly Uncle Peter.

She was going slowly, slowly, surely, toward the dark, pale, eager man at the altar. To John Kelly, waiting for his wife.

CHAPTER XXII

Sometimes the swift passage of the months, the terrible months that so quickly made years, frightened Cecilia Cunningham. The little-girl years, thirteen, fifteen, sixteen, had seemed so long, one was so eternally a junior, admiring one's older Cousin Kate for her seniority of thirteen months—coaxing to go to the Orpheum—too young for the hotel dances, in Mama's opinion!

Now suddenly, violently, one was twenty-one, twenty-three, twenty-five. The Christmases flew by, with women congratulating each other in the crowded shops upon the floods of golden western sunshine; the Easters seemed to touch one another, with Saint Mary's all stalky lilies and twinkling candles, and sweet-scented, swooning heat. The Cunninghams went to the Lake, they returned for September shopping; the deluging rains began. And presently it was Cecy's birthday again.

Paul had birthdays, too—was ten, eleven. There was an operation, attended with novenas and the lighting of blessed candles, there was the gradual slow slipping of strength and color.

Cecy was lovely at twenty-five, still rosy, her healthy firm cheeks still delicately peppered with golden freckles. She went downtown for her mother, returned with packages, reports, a surprise for Paul. She went to girls' card parties, and won prizes. She was an ideal big sister to little Ellen, when Ellen came home from her convent boarding-school for vacations, and she was angelically tender and patient with Paul.

Upon Kate she called almost every morning, and the cousins chatted

desultorily across the great gulf that divided them. Kate was thinner now, more beautiful than ever in the agony and delight of young motherhood. Kate's whole being flamed like a sacrificial altar before the needs of her babies. She wore big crash aprons, she tested bath-water with a dipped bare elbow, she tasted lukewarm bottles with a faint doubtful frown.

She and John were building a big house in Saint Francis Wood, a house full of porcelain bathtubs and clean new wood and sparkling big windows that gave upon a foggy ocean. Kate and Cecy went out to inspect it, between nursings, taking young Frank, in his white coat and buttoned gaiters. Frank was a beautiful child, the baby Jimmy was a fat gurgling double-chinned baby; Kate said, with her rich laugh, that she wished the new baby wasn't coming *quite* so soon; it didn't seem quite fair to Jimmy to push him out of his place yet awhile.

"Kate, you with three! But it doesn't seem possible! It seems yesterday that you were married," Cecy would say.

But she was not thinking of Kate. Years meant nothing to Kate, absorbed, beloved, building a home, bearing children. It was to Cecy, the ideal sister and daughter, that the flying of time was cruel. Why didn't her life come to her, her own life? When would that begin?

Sometimes she quarreled with Mart, and sometimes was captious with her mother. "Oh, what's the difference?" Cecy would plaintively murmur, with an impatient stress upon the last word, when her mother adroitly coaxed her into getting new clothes, going to parties.

Most of the time, however, she was merry, cheerful, coming in from city journeys full of chatter, quite the life of the staid luncheon table, where Maggie still wore her dangling dressmaker's pincushion pinned to her maiden breast, where Allie detained the waitress with asides regarding Paul's tray, and where tempered light still streamed in through drawn wooden shutters and looped red curtains.

"Will you ever forget the day Tom swallered the fishbone, Mollie?"

"Oh, God help us—wasn't that a day?"

"Oh, and I met Stan Thornton, down on Kerney Street," Cecy might say suddenly. "And he says that Gertrude has a little boy, born last night."

"For heaven's sakes, how long have they been married?" It might be Allie, Maggie, or Mollie, it might even be Grace Nolan, the old servant, who involuntarily asked the question, as she passed the rolls.

"Well, that's what I thought! But it was Christmas a year ago, Mama, when you come to think about it."

And Cecy would think of the years again. Twenty-five, almost twenty-six. At twenty-six life would practically be over, one was an old maid then.

"Hello, is it you, Cecilia? I asked for you, dear, because I didn't want to frighten your dear mama. This is Sister Mary Baptist, Cecilia, and I only wanted to say that we are a little worried about Ellen, and I was

wondering if you could come over and see her this afternoon? Or perhaps Mama would come, if you can manage it without alarming her. Doctor Costello has just been here, and he says there is absolutely nothing alarming about it, but Good Mother thought that perhaps I had better telephone you."

"Oh, Sister, tell me the truth! Is Ellen seriously ill?" Cecy's hand, holding the receiver, shook with sheer fright. "My father and mother are at church, and then they were going out to the hospital to see my little brother," she said, wildly. "But I could get them, I know! I could send my brother Martin——"

"No, no, no, dear; there's no occasion. It's merely that Ellen isn't very well, and feels just a little lonely. How is the dear little brother?" pursued the nun's smooth voice, carried by telephone from the peaceful suburban town twelve miles away, where Ellen had been a boarder for almost two years.

"Paul?" Sorrow came into Cecy's own young voice. "He's not so well, Sister. They've been trying the new treatment, you know, but he doesn't seem to have gained very much. They think now that he's better at home, and my father's going to have him brought home on Thursday."

"We are all praying for him," said the nun, sympathetically, and tears came into Cecy's eyes as she answered gratefully:

"Oh, thank you, Sister."

She turned away from the telephone solemn with new responsibility. Martin—where was Martin? The Cunningham family had lately come to feel that nothing could be done without Martin.

There was pleasant Sunday order and a spring silence and airiness throughout the empty house. Aunt Allie with Peter and Mollie had gone to "High," the maids were murmuring over chickens to be cleaned and ice to be packed, far downstairs. Martin was whistling softly upstairs, in his own room.

With a slight, not all unpleasant, sense of strangeness and fear upon them, the brother and sister scribbled a reassuring word for Mollie, left cautionary messages with the maids, and went forth together into the sharp April airs. The convent was across the bay, almost an hour's trip. It was windy and cool in the city, but there were only faint warm breezes stirring on the water, and the country, splashed today with languid satiny poppies and masses of varnished buttercups tall in the tall wheat, was balmy and sweet. Cecy's face grew flushed as they walked the half-mile to the convent garden, and Martin carried her coat.

Martin was not so romantically handsome as Tom had been. But he was tall, attractive, and honest looking, and he had the blue Cunningham eyes. Cecy, introducing him in the dustless coolness and spaciousness of the echoing parlor, was proud of him.

"But you're never the bad boy that climbed into our old oak, and frightened the wits out of our girls in retreat?" merry little Sister Mary Baptist asked him, smiling up at him through glasses. "Dear, dear, how

you children grow up! Cecilia, you know Doctor Costello? Now, Doctor, you tell these good children that there is nothing in the world to be alarmed about in Ellen's case, and I'll go up and tell the young lady that she has callers."

Certainly Cecy remembered Robert Costello, the dark, big, serious man, who had been Tom's friend and classmate years ago. But what was he doing over here? Didn't he still live in the city, with his aunt?

Yes, but his aunt was spending a month at the hotel, and he was with her, he explained. The regular convent physician was ill. Cecy remembered then that the old aunt was enormously wealthy, and "queer." She had seen her husband and sons drown before her eyes, "or something," Cecy recalled vaguely. Doctor Robert was her idol, he was to have all her money, on condition that he did not marry in her lifetime. Cecy had an impression that he was rather a harsh, cold, almost diabolically clever young surgeon.

"Weren't you camping last summer, up near Tahoe?" she asked. "It seems to me somebody told Mama that your aunt and you were there?"

"Yes, I know just where your camp is." He said it so grimly, so dispassionately that Cecy, with a little inward indignation, decided that she wouldn't offer him an opportunity for a snub with any suggestion of interchanged visits. "We're four miles further up, on the Truckee road," he said. "I wish—I'd like to ride over some day," he went on, a little awkwardly, "and see—see that little brother of yours——"

"He's just awkward; that old witch of an aunt has scared him of girls," Cecy decided, compassionately, as she cordially invited him.

"Cecy gets 'em!" Martin thought, with an inward chuckle. Doctor Robert said that he would be sure to ride over some day. Throaty and dignified with his trimmed beard and big glasses, he reported reassuringly upon Ellen. Just a few days' quiet in bed, that was all she needed, and—he added, with a significant glance for Cecy—a dose of big sister. She wanted her big sister.

Cecilia, smiling at him kindly, and astonished at his unexpected graciousness, left the two men together, and went with the nun upstairs to the infirmary. Order, silence, shining dustlessness everywhere, tempered sunshine outside, on the spring roses and the blazing flowerbeds; tree shadows over the well-swept garden walks, the scattered benches, the tennis courts and fountains. Inside, polished floors, noiseless feet, lowered voices, wide clean spaces filled with clear light and clear shadow.

"Sister," the nun's voice, addressing another nun who passed her, was merely a soft hiss, like the sound of a kettle, "did you——"

Cecy lost the message. It was silently, smilingly received; the two parted again. The delicate chipping of unseen feet, the almost inaudible closing of a great door, and then silence.

Silence. The wide infirmary, shaded against the morning light, was full of whiteness, and cleanness, and silence.

Ellen was ecstatic with delight. She confessed to Cecy, when they were

alone, that her illness had been half homesickness. How was darling Pop, and Mom, and Paul? Paul was trying a new treatment again? Would they operate again?

She looked lean, sweet, unformed, at sixteen, in her pretty nightgown. Everyone was "peachy" to her, it appeared. Rob Costello gave her a pain, with the airs he put on, but the nuns and the girls were one and all "peachy." An immaculate, much-laundered light blanket, between two flat, immaculate linen sheets, covered her. There were roses in a sparkling glass jar beside her. Everything was ordered and fresh and spotless. She wriggled about animatedly, swooped to the floor for a fallen book.

"Is your food nice, darling?"

"Yes, what that simp Rob Costello lets me have! Oh, yes, my trays are gorgeous. Baked custards, and chicken and everything."

"It's a lovely atmosphere, isn't it?"

"Isn't what?"

"The convent. I love it."

"Oh, help!" ejaculated Ellen. "You can have it! I get out of here in June, and if I ever come back, it'll be under chloroform."

"Oh, I love it," Cecy said, wistfully. "I loved Saint Elizabeth's when they took boarders there, but this is lovelier, somehow."

"This is the mother house for California; all the postulants and novices come here," said Ellen, wisely. "Listen, Sis," she added, animatedly, "you can save my life, if you will, but if you ever tell Mom, I'll cut my throat."

"Oh, Ellen, darling, don't talk so wildly. Is it money?"

"Money? It's one of the day-boarder's brothers—Jim Dale, his name is. Isn't it a cute name?"

"Ellen Cunningham! Mom would simply skin you!"

"Yes, I know she would. Well, anyway, he keeps hanging 'round here—he came to one of our dances, and he wrote me a letter about eloping—and I want you to telephone him for me——"

"Wrote you about—*what!*"

"About eloping," repeated Ellen, serenely. "He's twenty-two. He—you might as well know it, Cecy, he kissed me. I may as well tell you, we're sorter engaged."

"My Lord, how old are you?" Cecilia ejaculated, aghast.

"I'm almost seventeen!"

"Well, you'll feel smart when Pop gets hold of all this."

"Oh, he won't. Mother Bertrand just laughed. She talked to Jim's father about it. Anyway, I don't care, because Jim's coming up to the Lake this summer——"

"I hope you will marry young, Ellen," Cecy said, suddenly, out of deep thought. "If you don't—you seem to get old so suddenly——"

But she was not thinking of Ellen, except in a sort of general sense. She was thinking of the big clean hallways, the polished floors, the chipping feet, the white veils and black going busily about their appointed

tasks. And suddenly she knew that she would enter the convent as a postulant. She was strong, of age, her own mistress.

The intoxication of it thrilled in Cecy's veins like secret wine. She could hardly wait for the exquisite hours of the days to come, that should confirm and develop the great fact. She had found life, her own life, full and sweet and satisfying; she drew in great breaths of it.

Early in the afternoon, after the luncheon with a hundred uniformed girls, Sister Mary Baptist came smilingly to Cecy, with Good Mother's invitation to remain overnight. Martin went away. Cecy abandoned herself to the exquisite beginning of her dream.

It was not that she decided anything; there was nothing to decide. She was simply here, and she belonged here; this was her atmosphere, and to be hers for ever and for ever.

She sat with Ellen, met Ellen's closest friends, walked in the garden with her old friend, Sister Aloysius. Sister Aloysius was Mistress of Novices now, and Cecy thrilled to see her motherly ways with the "White Veils." The novices looked shyly and amiably at Cecy, and the girl looked back ardently, enviously.

The perfect afternoon lingered to twilight, delicious bells rang, there was Benediction in the chapel. Cecy hated her beautiful hat, longed for one of the coarse net veils that the aspirant religious wore.

Sunset light glowed in the memorial windows, topaz and ruby glass sent bright blots of color to fall upon the beautiful little chancel. The candles were eclipsed by the glory of the dying day, the air was sweet with heavy incense, and the young, virgin voices chanted the "Laudate Dominum."

Hidden in their veils, the nuns prayed, the postulants bowed their young heads. A few visitors, mothers of scholars, or devout women from the village, rustled on the uneasy polished benches.

"This is my sanctum," Sister Aloysius said, cheerfully, to Cecy, later that evening. The novices, like a troop of shy, awkward, radiant young deer, had gone to bed; Ellen was asleep. The Mistress of Novices had taken Cecilia in for a little parting talk. "Every one of my girls may find me here, at certain hours, and they come to me with all their troubles!" she said. "Poor children, we have seven nationalities represented here now, and twice as many states, and sometimes we have lively times reconciling them all to the new ways. But they struggle, and they succeed!"

"Tell me some of their trials," Cecy begged with relish, looking with passionate interest at the plain little room, with its bare floors and walls, its somewhat forbidding crucifix, and its hard chairs.

"Oh, they differ! Sensitiveness to criticism is a common one, the feeling of being misunderstood." The nun crossed her arms, burying her hands in her big loose serge sleeves, and the beads of her enormous rosary rattled. "Some of them I can laugh at, some are more serious. I preach my sermons here, and do all my scolding, and then at recreation I let them all be happy!"

"And what do you do at recreation, Sister?"

"Well, if it's fine, we always walk. You see we have forty acres here, so there is plenty of room. Sometimes good Sister Mary Joseph asks us to help her gather fruit or berries, sometimes I turn them all loose in the laundry, and they whisk through Sister Ligouri's dish-towels before she knows what has happened. On feast days we have chocolate hidden in the garden, or some little treat for dinner, and when it rains we have games in the Recreation Hall. Last year we went out with rakes, and saved all of Thomas's hay for him; we are always busy, I assure you."

"And what time do you get up, Sister?"

"At five, winter and summer. Meditation in the chapel from half-past five until Mass at seven, then breakfast, and then all sorts of duties! Class-rooms, music lessons, housework——"

"It sounds so happy——" Cecy mused, smilingly.

"Happy! My dear child, for the nun who has the true vocation it is the Kingdom of Heaven on earth."

Cecy sat staring at her, with whitened cheeks and luminous eyes. Suddenly she slid from her chair to her knees, at the nun's feet, and buried her face in the full, coarse skirts.

CHAPTER XXIII

KATE, coming quietly into the Cunningham house in Howard Street, upon a summer day, was directed upstairs by a single nod from a grave-faced maid, and found Allie Cunningham crossing the wide spaces of the upper hall.

"Come in here, Kate!" Allie said, mysteriously, catching the collar of Kate's coat. She drew her into Cecy's room.

"How is he?" asked Kate, seriously expectant.

Allie merely shrugged, faintly shaking her head. Her lip trembled.

"Does Aunt Mollie see it?"

"She must see it. Pete does. God help us all!" said Allie in a whisper, weeping. "It'll be the death of every last one of us!"

Kate sat down, sighing. In her plain suit and rich brown fur, her handsome hat pressed down over her blue eyes, she was more beautiful than ever. There was a certain fineness, a sweetness about her now that was new. The exquisite face, with its high cheek-bones and deep-set eyes, was a trifle thinner, and its contour more plain; her chestnut hair clung in rich shining rings against the brim of her hat.

"How are your children, Kate?" Allie asked, with a sniff.

"Oh, they're wonderful. I'm weaning Rosemary; the doctor says she's too much for me. They're all glorious. Frank is getting to be an absolute devil, and what he doesn't get poor Jimmy into isn't worth——"

She broke off. Maggie Walsh had come quietly in.

"How is he, Allie? Hello, Kate," said the newcomer, lifelessly.

Allie again shook her head.

"What I want you to do, Kate," she said in a whisper, "is talk Cecy out of this convent notion. As if poor Mollie hadn't enough on her mind, with Tom laying in a foreign grave somewheres for all we know, and Ellen back in school, and now the poor baby—I don't know what's come to her. She went over to the convent last spring with Mart, and there's been nothing else to it ever since!"

"But, Aunt Allie," Kate said, temperately, "if her heart's set on it——?"

"Why don't she marry Leo Cudahy, that's coining money?" Maggie demanded, impatiently. "I never heard the like of such nonsense! What better would she want? Pete admires him very much, and Mollie breakin' her heart for Cecy to have him, and all this convent talk goin' on! If anything happens to Paul she'll never forgive herself that she run out on them——"

"What does the doctor say?" Kate, with a cautious glance at the door, demanded in a low tone.

"Nothin' much," Allie sighed, and her eyes watered again. "But you know Mollie was all for gettin' Paul back to the Lake, a few weeks ago. And the doctor kinder talked her out of it. 'It's cool and comfortable in this big house,' he says. 'Leave him be, here, where all his grand toys are,' he says."

"You'd wonder Mollie wouldn't get onto it, his saying that," Maggie commented. Kate's passionately loving heart went in spirit to Frank, aged four, Jim, two years younger, and Rosemary, the baby, and a sickness of fear touched her. God! to lose one of them! How did mothers bear it?

"Mart told Paul that your motor-car was outside, Kate," Cecy said, in a subdued voice, appearing like a quiet wraith before them. "And Paul wants to see you!"

"Bless his heart, he's well enough to want things, then?" Kate said, clearly and cheerfully, making a little wholesome stir in the unnatural quiet of the upper hallway. She crossed to Paul's big room, entered gaily.

But instantly a sort of hush came upon her, and although she walked straight to the bed, and knelt down, with one of her warm, beautiful hands laid over his little languid one, it was in a different manner. Peter —Uncle Peter home in the daytime!—was sitting quietly in a big chair, a few feet away. Aunt Mollie, red-eyed and very white, but resolutely smiling and composed, was coming and going.

Paul, smiling too, moved only his big eyes to greet her. In his immaculate little pajamas he looked slight, his small face was absolutely bloodless. There were toys in the room still, neat toys ranged upon shelves, but Kate knew without looking, and felt her heart turn to ice to know, that the goldfish and the parrot, the big Angora cat and the horribly odorous, yet adored, white mice had been taken away.

"When'd you get back, Kate?" Paul asked, in his shadow of a voice. His thin little thumb rubbed back and forth against her warm firm hand.

"Last night, darling. We had those three wild babies of mine up at the camp, and whether we'll ever get them civilized again or not I don't know!"

"You've been gone a long time, Kate," said Mollie, in a voice drained of everything but blind courage.

"Since May. You won't know them! Sunburn, freckles, poison-oak, they haven't missed a thing!"

She was talking over a sick horror in her heart. Paul had not been well all those summer months ago, but he had not been like this! Terror, for the first time, touched her sharply. It couldn't be possible that this fight, this scare among so many scares, was to be the last? No—no—no, screamed Kate's own motherhood, deep within her.

"Pop's lost his job!" Paul jeered, smiling weakly at his father. Peter dragged himself up from the gates of hell, smiled.

"They fired the old man, Kate," he admitted. This was an inexhaustible joke. Paul, when business hours were abridged for his sake, always taunted his father, and Peter was always deeply mortified.

"I'll bet this boy would take a spoonful of your good soup jelly now, Mama," Peter suggested. The women in the halls were telling each other that Paul had not "kep' down" an ounce of nourishment for days.

The sick little boy's eyes clouded with protest, and he faintly shook his head.

"Please—Mummy. It makes me so sick!" he whispered.

"Well, then, you don't have to, dear," Peter was the first to assure him. But his heart was lead.

"No," said Mollie, sitting down close to the bed, in a tone only her own sick, desperate courage preserved upon its old, cheerful, motherly note. "He don't have to. Maybe he'll have a little nap, and then he'll feel hungry!"

Kate, stricken to the heart, went out of the big quiet room, where the familiar papered walls, and the window shades drawn against the glare of the summer afternoon, and the dim carpet across which trains and tin soldiers had traveled so many miles, seemed waiting—waiting.

"Did he take any soup?" Allie asked her, in the hall. Kate shook her head.

"He must have a marvelous constitution," she murmured.

"Oh, my!" Allie answered, shaking her own head, biting her lip. "She had another letter from Tom," she added, with a little jerk of her head toward Mollie's room, as an indication that she spoke of Mollie.

"China again? Is he coming home?" Kate asked, eagerly. Tom's mother so needed him now!

"Rangoon. It seems it's Burma," Allie said, lifelessly. "You'd think their oldest would be home with them, at this time," she added, darkly.

"Never a word of coming home in it, and he was on the move again! She cried something terrible."

"Aunt Mollie did? Oh, poor thing!"

"She kep' sayin': 'He has a right to be here—he has a right to be here!'" Allie reported, somberly.

"Oh, it is a cruel trial for them now, not even to know where Tom is!" Kate exclaimed.

"He says he's sendin' her a white fox coat," Allie continued. "I'd white fox him, the rennygade!"

"Aunt Allie, do they think Paul's so bad?" Kate's voice was no more than a fearful whisper.

Allie merely looked at her, the old, old look of hopeless grief.

"The doctor said Mollie needn't tease 'um to eat nothin' no longer," she said, lifelessly.

Kate's indrawn breath whistled between her teeth.

"But what about another doctor—other doctors?"

"Oh, Kate, we've had them all!"

Cecy, quietly joining them, on the top step of the broad stairway, pressed her handkerchief to her brimming eyes.

"This morning the doctor said he was afraid Paul was going on a long journey," she whispered. Kate's eyes dilated.

"He says, 'Well, you have a right to feel pretty badly, little boy!'" Allie added. "An' then out here he says, sort of gently to me and Cecy, 'I'm afraid our little boy is goin' on a long journey.'"

"My God, my God, my God!" Kate whispered. And for a few moments they were all silent.

Then Kate went upstairs to Martin's room.

The happy room, the room where they had all played "Lotto" and "Parchesi" as children, so many years ago! Where boys had flung distorted sweaters, had whittled, cleaned "B.B." guns, scattered transfers and stamps and cherry pits and all the other rubbish that had been gathered and hoarded so carefully years ago, and cleaned away, and that was now beginning to accumulate in Kate's clean big sunshiny rooms in turn.

Martin was flung face downward on his bed, but he got up immediately, splashed his face with water, combed his dripping hair. Kate took the chair beside the bureau.

"I had no idea," she said, in a long pause. "I came right over!"

"None of us had any idea it was so—close," Martin answered.

"There's a lock sticking straight up behind, Mart," Kate, watching him comb, said. "You've got it!"

He laid both brushes down, rested his elbows on the high dresser, mussed his hair with the grip of his big hands. Kate felt a physical sickness come over her, chill, cramp, utter weakness, as if the vital forces within her had turned to water.

Martin presently began to comb his hair again, turned upon her a colorless and automatic smile.

"All right, Katy, let's go down!"

She stretched a cold hand. They went downstairs, their fingers still locked, together. Kate found her uncle and Ellen in the downstairs sitting room, she and Ellen coaxed him to eat a little, to talk a little. He would talk only of Paul, but even that, she hoped, might not be as bad for him as the frozen silence of grief.

"Joe Riordan was cryin' when he ast for him today. I'll not forget that of Joe——"

"He's never had a child, has he?"

"No. The poor feller! He thought—he thinks the world and all of our Paul——"

Silence. Silence. After a while, in the early summer evening, they went upstairs to Paul's room again.

The child moved only his heavy, beautiful eyes to welcome them. Martin was kneeling beside the bed, and his big brown hands were locked over Paul's languid white ones. But the brothers were talking only in snatches.

Peter sat down, Kate took a chair. Mollie, her rosary twisted about her soft, full fingers, was in her usual place near the bed.

"Mart," said Paul's weak shadow of a voice, "where's Holy Joe?"

"Where is he? He's right here," Martin said, gently. "Lord, what that poor feller hasn't gotten into today! Would you like me just to sort of murmur along about him? Maybe you could drop off to sleep, and when you waked up," Martin went on, with a sort of dreamy easiness, "Gosh, how hungry you'd feel!"

Paul smiled, shut his eyes. His feeble fingers moved slowly across his brother's hand.

"Not now," he said. "But, Mart," he added, as Martin, looking down at his white little face, began to hope that perhaps he was sleeping in the shallow, brief fashion that was habitual of late, "Mart, will you say my prayers with me? Because I can't think awfully good——" Paul murmured, with shut eyes.

Silence. There was only one shaded light in the big room. Kate saw Peter, a great bulk in the soft gloom, slide stiffly from his armchair to his knees. Her heart began to hammer with terror.

"G'wan, Mart," Paul whispered, expectantly, not opening his eyes.

"S—sure I will," Mart answered.

"Here's Papa goin' to say his prayers with his boys, too," Peter's voice said softly, thickly. Paul opened his great shadowed eyes, smiling.

"Pop," he asked, faintly, "do you 'member when you'd say, 'What is Mr Emporium goin' to tell Mrs Emporium the little Cunningham boy got today'?"

"Don't I though?" Peter answered, clearing his throat.

Mollie, her face expressionless, calm, lighted with a strange pallor, sank to her knees. Cecy peeped in, flew, returned to kneel by the bed. Ellen and Allie were there, noiselessly gathering forms in the dusky

shadows. Kate, kneeling, hid her face in her hands. Her throat was dry, her heart pressed by an agony too great for bearing.

"Oh, God help us," she thought, frightened. "Oh, God help us! We *cannot* bear it——"

"Mart——" said Paul, his weak voice falling like the sound of a dying bell in the absolute stillness of the room.

"Sir to you!" It was the little family phrase of encouragement. Martin's white face, found by Kate's aching eyes, was set like a mask of tortured muscles. He did not know that he had spoken.

"Mart, if you was only a little feller," Paul murmured, "would you be a-scared, too?"

"Now, do you mean, dear?" Martin asked, after a second.

"Yes, now."

"No, I don't think I'd be scared, Paul," Martin answered, in a voice he made quiet. "I'd think that God loved little kids. Daisy wasn't but three, you know!"

"Daisy wasn't scared!" Paul said, in a stronger, in almost a boasting voice. "And she was only a baby!"

Silence. Paul's eyes were shut, he was breathing lightly and irregularly, against Martin's big shoulder.

"Neither am I!" he said, presently, with a child's deep, mysterious air of content.

He opened his big, dark blue Irish eyes, so oddly wise in the pale, little-boy face from which the healthy tan and freckles had faded years ago. They moved languidly over the group, found his mother's eyes, and smiled faintly.

"Mom——" His lips only formed the word, there was no sound. It was Tom's name, Mart's name, for her, rarely used by any one else. Then, for the last time, Paul's eyes closed again.

"Well, go ahead! Ain't we goin' to say our prayers, Mart?" he whispered, with just a hint of surprise, just a hint of impatience, in his loving, weary, satisfied little voice.

Kate's head was splitting, her mouth so dry that breathing was an agony. She could not cry; somebody sobbed once sharply and was still—Cecy or Allie. The lamp burned softly and clearly, a pool of warm gold in the hush of the room. There was no stir among the bowed and kneeling forms.

"Our Father who art in heaven," Martin's thick voice said, softly and steadily, "Hallowed be Thy Name—— Thy Kingdom come——"

"It's Paul, dyin'," Mollie thought, quietly. "It's the baby dyin'. My God, keep me like this—— Keep me from feelin' it, just for a little while!"

Lights and movement turned the night into day. Nobody could go to bed, there was only occasional pitiful talk of Mollie lying down, of Mart "getting some rest."

Peter, gray, stout, haggard, sat in the downstairs sitting room. He was very quiet. Before the cold dawn came they had a fire there, and Ellen, red-eyed with weeping, got into his lap in the old baby fashion, and clung there like a tired bird. "My little ger'rl, she's the baby of the family now. And thank God we have a son and dear girls left to us," Peter said.

The house was filled with smothered sobbing and wailing. The aged grandmother came, old friends came. A few of them, privileged, went up to Mollie's room, wept with her.

"Oh, Mollie dear, it's hard to bury them, the creatures!" they said. "Poor Lizzie's just through it. God love him, he never knew the touch of mortal sin! Well, Mollie, you've certainly had your share!"

The Archbishop came, knelt beside the exquisite figure of wax.

"The dove, finding no place to rest her foot, returned to Him in the ark!" said His Grace, in his heavy, slow tones. The women repeated it, Mollie, exhausted and faint of voice, told everyone who came with floods of fresh-running tears, what the Archbishop had said of her little saint.

Sometimes recollections stirred her, she talked of Daisy, of all the children's childhood, the sweet dead days of scratches and measles and dolls and sand-boxes.

Then the bitter realization would come rushing back.

"But I can't believe he's gone—not to come back into his room, and call out to Mart, when Mart comes in!" Mollie would whisper. "I lived for him—my whole life was in there beside him! Pete never spent an evenin' away from him, he was up there before dinner, and he'd take his paper up there afterward, and talk to the child, or maybe listen to what he'd be sayin' to Mart about 'Holy Joe'——"

The child lay downstairs, in all the formal splendor of the big double parlors; Kate and Allie had many willing hands to help them as they changed the entire aspect of the room that had been Paul's for so many years. The toys disappeared, chairs and tables were pushed into different places, the potted flowers, the parrot, the goldfish never came back again, nor the shining railroad tracks on the floor, nor the Victrola.

About a week after the funeral Kate came in, with her two sturdy baby sons, to find Martin moving downstairs to occupy the so terribly empty apartment.

Martin had aged strangely; he seemed a man. Everyone in the family knew what Paul had meant to him, but he showed little of his grief, and it was only in his changed manner that they read it. He impressed little Frank and Jim Kelly at once into his service.

"Here, you bums. Keep your hands off that camera. If you want jobs I'll give you jobs——"

The diminutive brothers, staggering in their stout little striped rompers, shrieked with excitement as Martin tumbled them upon the unmade bed.

"You'll kill them," Kate predicted, glad of a pretense at cheerfulness.

"Here—where are sheets? I'll make this bed. I think this was a good idea, Mart," she added, approvingly. "It brings you down with Aunt Mollie and the girls; it's much more sociable."

"You're one of the few living women, Kate, who pull the sheets snug. The maids adore to leave 'em bagging, so that your feet are in a muddle all night."

"Doesn't John always know it if Biddy makes his bed?" Kate said, her splendid figure erect as she swept blankets through the air. "He'll wriggle and twist——"

She stopped, with the married woman's delicacy, as Cecy and Ellen came in. Mollie, weary and heavy, followed them, and sat down to watch the scene.

"Go kiss Aunt Mollie, Frank," Kate directed the staring babies. "Go with Brother, Jim. Do as Mother tells you!"

"Changes, Katie," Mollie said, raising apathetic eyes.

"You look better, dear," Kate said, gently, kissing her. "Did you get out today?"

"I went to church. And I was goin' with Pete to the cemetery," Mollie answered, in lifeless, quiet accents, "but your Uncle Peter wouldn't leave me go. He wants that the stone should be put up before I go."

"He picked out a lovely stone; he and I went together," Martin told Kate. "Just like Daisy's—plain, with the standing angel."

Mollie's face crumpled, and she began to cry. Nobody paid her the slightest attention, they all murmured cheerfully together, although Ellen's eyes watered, and the tears ran frankly down Cecy's cheeks.

"And what do you think of that one wantin' to run off and be a nun on us?" Mollie, restored to her usual mournful composure, presently asked.

"Oh, well, Aunt Mollie, that's as much a vocation as getting married!" Kate reminded her, cheerfully.

"Papa's willing," Cecy said, quietly but eagerly.

"Before I'd be a nun I'd go bad!" Ellen contributed with conviction. Martin laughed with exaggerated mirth, and Kate was glad to see that her aunt had spirit enough left to be shocked.

"Elleneen, don't say such things, and show your ignorance!" she rebuked her younger daughter.

"Well, I would," persisted Ellen, perfectly conscious of the fact that a little controversy was wholesome for her stricken mother.

"Well, you don't have to be a nun, dear little sister!" Cecy assured Ellen, with a merry laugh and an embrace. There was already about Cecy the sureness of the elect. There were to be no scenes, no storms and tears about her vocation now; she was confident and patient and serene at last.

"Why she wouldn't marry, and maybe give me a grandchild," Mollie complained, mildly, with a dark look at Cecy, "when a fine feller like Leo Cudahy comes after her, with his car, and loads of money, and more

some day when his bachelor uncle dies, beats me! She won't look at him. Oh, no, it's all religion now, and the white veil, and Sister This and That!"

"You can live as good a life in the world as in any convent," Maggie Walsh, who came in almost every day to chat with and comfort her bereaved sister, said sententiously. "Believe me, it isn't all easy for the Sisters. 'There's faults and fights wherever there's wrongs and rights,' as the sayin' goes, and many's the time them nuns would like to be back in their good homes again!"

Cecy, her eyes full of dreams, dreams of wide, quiet halls, of shaded garden walks, of the silent chapel in the cool summer dawn, made no answer. But Kate said pacifically:

"Still, a religious vocation is a beautiful thing, Aunt Maggie."

"If you have it!" Maggie answered. "But some's called to one thing, and some to another. There was a very old aged priest of eighty or more I ast would I marry poor Frank Cahill. 'Some's called to one thing and some to another,' he told me. I never forgot it on him!"

"And he was right," said Allie. "Look at me! Here for more than twenty-five years I run my brother's house for him, and whether it'll stand to me credit on the Judgment Day, or whether——"

"Well, I don't know why my children should be such a bitter trile to me!" Mollie said, heavily, with trembling lips. She got slowly to her feet, and the others watched her solemnly as she went from the room.

Kate followed her to her own room, made her lie down on the bed and spread a rug on the stout, unromantic, middle-aged feet Mollie turned up so pathetically. Then she perched herself at the foot, in all the glory of her own beautiful youth and happy motherhood, and they fell into one of the long matronly talks by which Mollie had distinguished her niece of late years.

With Allie, Maggie, and her daughters Mollie could discuss death, bereavement, change, illness, weddings, religious matters. But with Kate, nowadays, she could go further; there were only the limits of Christian modesty and reserve upon their conversations now. Husbands, and their strangely trying and endearing ways, babies and their little throats and stomachs, all the delicate questions of weaning them, of calculating their arrivals, of physical symptoms on the part of mothers and children, were theirs to review now.

When Kate was physically miserable, albeit philosophical and thankful under the common cross, Mollie was mournfully triumphant.

"Ah, well, you must look for that, dear!"

"But it's feeling so utterly *limp,* Aunt Mollie! I no sooner get out of bed but what I want to get back into it again. I often wonder what women do who can't afford a nurse for the other children! I can't raise my hand!"

"It's all part of it, Kate. You'll thank God when you have a fine child in your arms!"

And when Kate, sobered by knowledge, turned a little pale, and fixed thoughtful narrowed eyes upon space, at the mention of the approaching ordeal, Mollie was reassuring.

"Look at me, that went through it seven times, and never a whiff of anything to help me! He's got his ticket, as the sayin' is, Kate, and when the time comes he's going to start, and that's all there is to it."

"One wonders," the younger mother would say, softly, in a half-musing tone, "one wonders if this time one may be taken. What a hard death, Aunt Mollie, leaving the little helpless creatures without a mother!"

"But look at you, Kate, that had neither mother nor father! And look at all's come to you, rich, and with a good man, and these fine children——"

"Yes, I know. Indeed I do think of that!"

"There's nothing could come to her too good for that one!" Maggie always said of Kate, when any comment upon her niece's prosperity was made in her hearing. For Kate was among that army of young women who are generally described as "good to her own."

Every step toward ease and beauty in her own fortunate life was accompanied by increasing comfort in the plain little cottage in Turk Street. Grandma, to be sure, shrill and vigorous, refused flatly to move into a more modern apartment, where a gas stove and elevator would make her declining years less hard. Old Mrs Walsh refused to decline. Some interested househunters, innocently under the impression that the cottage was for rent, and approaching with queries, she sent forth with bitter vituperations, and ever afterward characterized as "them Christian Scientists that would of let me Lady Washintons die on me!"

But Maggie could take down the sign that said "Walsh. Modes." now, and what Mrs Walsh called a "little Jap lady that wants to learn to speak English off us," came in daily to do the housework. Harry and Charley, still incorrigibly idle and drifting, were yet somewhat better groomed, and even more lofty and complacent than ever. They called at irregular intervals, and with great dignity, upon John Kelly, and John always plunged his generous hand into his pocket when they came, and laughed with Kate about them afterward.

"It won't be for ever, poor old things!" said Kate.

Mollie's generosity, always the one stable element that kept the Walsh family afloat, became even more marked, to correspond with Kate's. In the old times, Mollie had questioned, had expected some sort of accounting, had criticized her unambitious brothers. But now she vied with her niece in open-handedness. Maggie never would have a bank-account or a check-book, the mere thought of such commercial technicalities made her uneasy. But she liked to carry bills, or the notification of taxes, into Peter's or John's office, and spread them anxiously, with her decent black suède glove, beneath the male eye.

And she loved to have money in her purse: large silver dollars, a

twenty-dollar bill folded up small. Kate took possession of this purse at almost every meeting, and Maggie would laugh deprecatingly while she pretended not to see the transfers that were made.

Kate and Maggie often lunched at the Palace Hotel or the Fairmont now, and Maggie had the black lace gown and the hat with the pink roses for warm spring and autumn days, and said that she felt like "Paddy's gander."

"Chicken Maryland, Aunt Mag?" the gracious woman who was her hostess would ask her. "Do you remember the hot nights we'd decide what we'd have? Or maybe winter, with all our wet coats smelling up the kitchen?"

"Tell him somethin', and get rid of him!" Maggie would say, of the waiter, in an agonized undertone. "Don't it seem like a dream, Kate?" she would ask, looking out upon the descending slopes of the city and the blue bay cut with the sharp wakes of the ferry-boats.

The music would begin, the big room fill with beautiful women, beautiful gowns, pleasant voices. And when anybody bowed to young Mrs John Kelly, and Mrs John Kelly nodded and smiled in return, Maggie's heart always swelled with felicity, and she reported the circumstance later to her mother.

Afterward, they would loiter down the two steep blocks to Chinatown, Maggie would have a new kimono, there would be tea for Grandma. "And I oughter send May Buckley something for the Bazaar!" Maggie would remember.

"Oh, let me, Aunt Mag. I'd love to!" Kate would say. And when they ended their expedition with a visit to dim, shabby old St Mary's, where there was "Forty Hours'," and the candles winked through furry pussy-willows on the high altar, Maggie looked at the young bowed form beside her almost reverently, and went home to say thankfully that thank God Kate was as good, as pious, as unspoiled as in the shabby, tempestuous, hungry, ambitious days of the old Library.

It was a delicious note in her life that Allie, Pete's sister, who had lived in the big house, sheltered and safe, for twenty, almost thirty years, envied her now. Actually envied Maggie Walsh, who had no big house to manage, and no prosperous sister-in-law like Mollie to keep satisfied!

"We're a grand family now, what with poor Mollie grievin' so bitter, and the most of them scattered to the four winds!" Allie complained to Maggie. "I'd be very glad to make the retreat with you, if it wasn't I had a new table ger'rl to break in that never seen a fingerbowl before! 'Oh,' she says, 'an' when you put the lemon into them, do you put a tasteen of bar sugar along with it?' 'I'll bar sugar you, in a place you don't expect, me fine young ger'rl, that has the gall to expect sixty dollars a month for what you do!' I told her."

"It's easy for me to make the retreat," Maggie answered, complacently. "I and Ma have a cup of good coffee at seven, and then she gets out into the garden and fixes her plants, and I do my marketin' on

the way to the convent. Keno comes in at nine, and she cooks Ma's lunch. Or maybe Ma and I go out to Kate's——"

"Kate's the lucky one," Allie mused. "You'd wonder one of Mollie's hadn't a right to get married; it's Kate that got it all. She takes it very hard, poor Mollie, and God knows she's had her share! Now Cecy's surely goin' to enter—Pete made no fuss at all about it. He's very broke, over Paul. 'We haven't no right to stop them, Allie,' he says to me. She'll go in just before Lent. And with Tom gone, and Paul, God love him, and Cecy—dear, dear, ain't life the limit?"

"Dear knows what Mollie'll do now," Maggie mused. "I was there the other day, runnin' up a little dress for Ellen, that's getting so big, and she come in from upstairs. 'Nobody in the nursery now, Mag,' she says, with a look of death on her, 'nobody in Tom's room, Mart's room empty, Paul gone, and my little Daisy that used to tell how the choo-choo went! And next spring,' she says, 'Cecy's room, too!' You would have felt sorry for her," Maggie finished, simply.

"Mollie had it too easy, for years upon years," was Allie's thoughtful comment before a long silence fell.

CHAPTER XXIV

KATE, ELLEN, AND MOLLIE accompanied Cecy to the convent on the Monday before Mardi Gras. It was a smoking hot, blue spring day, and Kate's little boys, running about on the clean, bright deck of the boat, showed damp curls pressed against wet little foreheads when their mother straightened their wide sailor hats.

They were beautiful children: Frank, tall, rangy and fair, like his mother; Jim stocky and dark, and already John's double. Ellen made much of them, and Mollie admired them in a sad sort of way. But Kate was a trifle worried about two facts: one that Frank must positively have his tonsils out before he could put on any weight, and the other that Jim had been playing with Baby all morning, and that she, Kate, had later discovered that Jim had been exposed to measles yesterday. The Prendergast children all had it, not badly, but unmistakably measles.

"I'm not afraid of it for Jim," Kate said more than once, as they made the pleasant trip, in the freshness of the bay airs. "He's as hard as nails, and besides, a child his age is on an easy diet. But my Rosemary's a picky and choosy little eater; she never finishes a bottle, and eggs—Biddy and I tried her on eggs—seem to poison her. She'll flirt with me, and she seems perfectly well, but she doesn't gain the way she ought to. And I hate measles. They so often leave a child with something. Didn't dear little Daisy have measles?"

"Oh, yes, but it was Tom had them so heavy," Mollie remembered, with the customary heavy sigh. "Daisy's come out on her good, and the baby's—that was Mart then, wasn't nothin'. But Tom——"

After all, there was nothing sensational about the sacrifice of a daughter to God. The convent was looking its beautiful best in the spring glory of flowers and new leafage, and Cecy bloomed like a bride as Sister Stanislaus took possession of her.

The nun showed them pleasantly and easily the white-curtained alcove where Cecy would sleep, the postulants' little refectory, with polished bare floor, polished bare table, geraniums blooming on the wide window-sill, the recreation room.

"I may put her in one of the guest-rooms tonight," said Sister Aloysius, "for I have two dear girls coming from Hollister tomorrow, sisters, and I'll take my three chickens under my wing at once. We have four other postulants, and as soon as these new ones get a little easier, I can have them all together. But perhaps I'll have Cecilia wear her hat for another twenty-four hours."

"Oh, *Sister!*" Cecy pleaded, her face pitiful with disappointment.

"And oh, Cecilia!" the nun mimicked her tone cheerfully. "You know you have to obey now. That's the hardest and the first lesson to learn," she added, crossing herself with a generous sweep of her firm, clean hand, as they passed a tiny holy-water font and a soaked sponge; "and the last!" she added, leading them into the morning silence and beauty of the shaded chapel, where they all said a devout prayer for the success of the new postulant. "She loves me now!" Sister Aloysius said, good-humoredly, in parting, with her arm once more about the radiant Cecilia's waist. "But she's going to dislike me heartily in a few weeks! Wait until I begin to scold her, as I do all my girls!"

The family group was rather silent, going home without Cecy. Kate's younger son went peacefully to sleep in her arms, on the boat, with his little plump leg rolling back and forth across her knee. Kane and the car were waiting on the other side. Mollie drove her niece to her own door, but she would not come in.

"She looked old for the first time, John," Kate told her husband later. "Even Tom's going away, and all the uncertainty and anxiety, even Paul's death, didn't seem to take it out of her somehow the way Cecy's entering did! She looked broken. She told me that she minded most for Uncle Pete. 'God sent them to me, and He can dispose of them!' she said to me. But she's a different woman from my old, arrogant, confident Aunt Mollie! Go on now, sweetest," Kate added in an undertone to the baby, who was gurgling, rolling, crowing, and doing everything but finish her ten-o'clock bottle.

"If she doesn't want it, why do you make her take it, Kate?" John demanded, with a faint hint of impatience in his voice.

"She does want it, darling, only she doesn't know it!" Kate responded, blithely.

"I suppose you're going to break our hearts one of these days, entering a convent, or something?" John demanded, of his youngest born.

"She's going to go to sleep now," Kate decided, taking away the bottle

and bundling the baby expertly on her side, to tuck the little pink blanket snugly about her. Rosemary reared strongly, with a questioning look over her own diminutive shoulder. "No, you lie down!" directed Kate. "Put that light out, John. John, do we spoil them, as Uncle Peter and Aunt Mollie did?" she asked, as she and John went through the open dressing-room door to their own big room.

"I suppose so, sweetheart. I'm too crazy about them, and you spoil everybody," John said, thoughtfully. "I get to thinking about them sometimes, in the office, and I'll feel the tears on my face——"

"I know," Kate said. "But they *do* obey, John. And I do keep them simple! At the shore last summer they were the plainest dressed of all the youngsters."

"The eye of the needle," John reminded her, beginning his undressing.

"Yes, I know!" she said, soberly, with a sigh. And she sat for a long time motionless, a loose thin wrapper about her, her rich mass of chestnut hair tumbling on her shoulders. Her bare elbows were on the dressing-table, and her chin propped in one hand.

A hundred times he had seen her so, but never without a little check to his breath; that so much beauty and goodness was his, abiding here with him, that so rare a woman as Kate had cast her fortunes indissolubly in with his.

All about her were the evidences of their prosperity; her blue eyes reviewed them thoughtfully. The simple jewels, the jade and crystals that John had given her were tumbled on a tray, the gold-backed toilet brushes and bottles ranged about them, the big beautiful room, with chintzes at the windows and deep chairs at the tiled fireplace, was luxuriously furnished. There was a big dressing room, where the adored baby was now asleep; an enormous bath. There were other rooms beyond, clean closets full of china and linen, airy bedrooms arranged especially for small hands and feet. On John's high dresser was an enlarged photograph of Kate herself, her first, taken only a few months after their marriage.

They had built this house, he and she, five years ago, and she had felt wild with excitement and delight then. A house—a mansion indeed, in the very heart of the Terraces! A wide, sunshiny garage, big porches, a dining room for the maids and nurse, and always a view of the rolling ocean only a few hundred feet away.

But tonight she was a little frightened. All very well to reach the apex of human achievement, to be rich and loved and good-looking and the mother of glorious children, but what then? What lay beyond?

"John," she said in a somewhat troubled voice, "we can't make them poor! I would—God knows I would, if it was best for them. I'd take a flat in McAllister Street, with you, and cook for them, and do for them! But we can't do that. Do you suppose they'll break our hearts some day, doing the wrong things and marrying the wrong people?"

"No, I don't suppose so," John answered, after a pause. "If we're only

pretty sure that things *are* wrong, and people *are* wrong, before we make a fuss!"

"But look at Aunt Mollie," pursued Kate. "She's always been such a devoted mother, always so anxious that the children should be good. Now, out of seven, she's left alone with Ellen and Mart——"

"Well, Ellen and Mart's the pick of the bunch, if you ask me," John said, encouragingly, as she paused. "Yes, but I think they made an awful mistake with Tom, sending him to Paris," he added. "I remember thinking so when he went. He was too handsome, to begin with, and then he's got all the Walsh—what do you call it?—charm, I guess. Dangerous! And I don't consider that Cecy, becoming a nun, has exactly disgraced them! As for Paul——" John sighed suddenly. "That might happen to anybody's kid," he said, mildly.

"The Lord forbid!" said Kate, braiding her hair.

"The Lord forbid indeed! But it's the way Aunt Mollie talks about all these things—the way she takes them——" John grumbled.

"Well, perhaps that's partly it. But surely, John," Kate said, argumentatively, "surely after all the agony and cost of having children, a mother and father can expect *something* back from them?"

John made no answer. Presently he asked her if she knew that she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

Kate, however, answered herself some months later. They were up in the mountains then, in the new camp.

For the first summer or two after their marriage they had visited the hotel near Mollie's camp; for the third they had taken one of her cottages. Now they had their own camp, wooded acres upon the sapphire tip of a little mountain lake, a piny carpet underfoot, a flood of scented golden sunshine pouring down through layers of redwood foliage all the summer long.

It was but three miles from Mollie's; a rambling, dipping corduroy road connected the two places. Kate had had a stark, unlovely farmhouse with a deep front porch, a tangle of deep-roofed old barns, to begin with. But presently a garage arose, green boxes outlining the porch dripped nasturtiums and geraniums, a supplementary cabin was built of redwood logs. "Mart's house," a single, pine-scented room, was erected by Mart himself at the turn of the wood trail; a hundred yards away a screened dining room grew out of the whitewashed kitchen, and a brick grill and long table had their place under the pines by the shore.

To Kate it was Paradise, dearer even than the imposing city house. Her children, the dear little tumbled, dusty, weary children, were all her own here. It was with great difficulty that she and Biddy, the old crone of a nurse, persuaded them to submit, now and then, to the ordeal of being combed and washed, and taken down to the hotel for a meal. Kate and John extended a happy hospitality; other fathers and mothers, other troops of uproarious youngsters, came up for visits, and there was noise and clatter about the place all week long. Old Mrs Walsh was almost

always there, and Maggie as often as her sisterly obligations permitted.

On this particular evening seven children, Kellys and Prendergasts, the toddling Rosemary a shrieking and enthusiastic vanguard, had left the long, wooden-walled dining room by means of a low window, jumping into an abandoned armchair set in the garden a few feet below.

Kate lingered on, gossiping with Ellen and her Aunt Mollie, who had come up the day before, helping herself and them and the old grandmother and Maggie, who was her guest for the summer, to peaches, and a few more peaches, as the conversation wandered idly to and fro.

The day had been warm, but now the sun had disappeared with the abruptness that ends the light in the high mountains, and a delicious piny coolness was creeping into the burned air. Biddy waddled after the children with an armful of disreputable sweaters; their shouts came through the still clear blueness of the dusk. A great moon raised a shoulder over the dark water, drifted splendidly up over the pines. Crickets rasped, and frogs sent a pulsing brassy clamor through the air.

"Why those children don't fall apart every night, with sheer tiredness," Ellen began, dreamily.

Silence. Everyone was pleasantly weary, heavy with food and sleep and the first hint of chill.

"Aunt Mollie," Kate asked, suddenly, her face almost invisible, her gown only a white glimmer in the gloom, "were you ever so happy that you were afraid?"

"Oh, manny's the time, dear!" Mollie said, sighing deeply. "When Pete and I begun to prosper so, and built the big house, haven't I gone on my knees frightened out of my wits, over and over again, for fear some sorrow'd befall me!"

"And God knows they did, Mollie," Maggie said, lovingly and sadly.

"Whin I had the whole boonch of me children, Robbie and Charley and Mollie here, and Mag and Harry," old Mrs Walsh spoke up suddenly, "haven't the stren'th of joy come over me so bitther and so sorrowful that me hear'rt was ashes within me? I'd look about me—sure, everybody weren't millionaires thin, wit' cars and movin' pitchers and all, gas stoves and I don't know what," she diverged, "but we lived very decent and quiet. I'd a cook in me kitchen," she resumed, "and a wild little orphan ger'rl that had no parents, to look out for me young childdren, and enough to eat, and I thought I was Adelina Patti herself! And manny's the time I'd cast me glance at this neighbor and that, and say to meself, 'Sure, she has more than me! If the Lord's lookin' down that He may send a thrile to some poor mother, He'll not pick me yet awhile."

"Oh, Grandma, I've done that so often!" Kate exclaimed, with relief under her delicious laugh.

"But it don't keep off the sorrow, Kate," Mollie reminded her.

"Well, then," Kate's voice was valiant in the dusk, "well, then, if you say to yourself that nothing will really hurt them except sin, and keep praying for them——"

And in the silence that followed, she answered the long-ago question, forgotten even by herself now.

"But remember this!" she said, vigorously. "Remember it, all of you, when Frank runs off with a tattooed lady, and Jim embezzles the company's funds, and Rosemary—oh, God forbid any one of them should ever do anything but be good!" Kate interrupted herself in a whisper. "But *remember,*" she began impressively again, "that having them as we have them now, so adorable, all tumbles and bee bites and rompers and spilled bowls, is reward enough for me, full measure, pressed down and running over, for anything I've ever done for them! If they'll just be spared to me, for arithmetic and blocks and Christmas trees, for a few more years, I'll try to bear whatever they do when they're grown up!"

"You say that now, Kate," Mollie said.

"Kate," her grandmother added, "is like an ould lady that lived to be ninety-eight, in some little boreen me grandmother, God rest her, resided in, wit' me Uncle Miles, that was kilt with the rheumatism the way he cud never walk a step, except the weather was very fine. Mrs Towley—that was her name—sure it wint out of me head until this very instant minute! Towley. An' she was a quare one, that one, that wouldn't thank you for anny company that was in it, leave it be priest or Pope, but walkin' wit' the silly geese and ganders themselves. She had one boy left out of a baker's dozen, some dead, some gone away, and he was pushin' eighty whin I was no bigger than a goose's egg. He was very comickle, that one. He used to say he'd seen four Kings rulin' in London, and the only man amongst thim was a woman! Well, what does me brave ould boy do but run wit' some queer Dicks, and get himself tuk by the police, and run into the little hut they had, till they'd see had he anny stolen stuff on him, and bein' late, and a very wild, foul evenin', they kep' him there overnight wit' two or three wanderin' rogues they had.

"He come home the next mornin', and he says to me own good mama, God rest her, 'Mrs O'Doyle,' he says, 'I'm afraid to go home and tell Ma I've been tuk by the police.' An' him eighty, mind! But that wasn't the whole of it," finished Mrs Walsh, in a shrill tone of extreme relish, as they all laughed. "His mother put on her shawl, an' footed it down all the way to Belcool jail and she dressed them fellers down good, and learned them more than the 'Hail Mary!' 'You murderers!' she says to them, 'to take a widder's only boy, and run him in wit' thieves and assassins an' pickpockets overnight,' she says to them. 'It'll be a miracle if he don't go bad, with all the sin and filt' he's learned off thim!' she says."

"You never told me that one before, Ma," Maggie commented, in deep appreciation.

"Well, I don't know why I wouldn't be telling you, except that I was a very young child at the time," Mrs Walsh responded, gratified. "She was an ould one, for you, an' still livin' whin I married the full of seven years later. It was very gratifying to see her step along to Mass, wit' her

brogues held up bravely in her hand. Sure, this boy of hers was goin' on eighty whin this occurred. He passed me own mother, who was out in a little gardeen she had, spuddin' at a few cabbages that grew there, an' 'Oh, Mrs O'Doyle,' he says——"

She rambled through the tale again, embellished it, her eldritch voice almost as soothing an undertone to this indulgent audience in the dreamy summer darkness as was the idle lap of the waves on the lake shore, the sound of frogs and crickets, the woodeny note of a distant owl.

"I guess Pop and John couldn't make it," Ellen observed, presently, after an actual silence.

"I guess not." Kate's heart sank. This was Friday night, John always came up on Friday night. That meant such a heartening assistance for Saturday's out-of-door lunch, such companionship over all the little problems, and in all the exquisite joys, of the happy country week-end.

And before her voice had fairly died away they heard the horn of the motor, repeated over and over again for the children's benefit, through the woods. There was an exclamation of pleasure around the table, and they lighted the bright electric lights that made everybody blink fuzzily and shade eyes. John's foot thundered on the porch.

"No Uncle Peter!" Kate exclaimed then, in John's arms.

For he was alone, and looked white and strained.

"Yep, he's here, and everything's fine," John said, clearly, in a loud unnatural tone. He put his wife gently aside, and went to her aunt. His manner was oddly excited and strange.

"Feeling pretty good, Aunt Mollie?" he asked, laughing with suddenly wet eyes.

"Oh, what is it, Jawn?" she faltered, clinging to him.

"Feel like hearing some good news?"

"Oh, dar'rlin'——?"

"John——!" Kate said, electrically.

"Well, then, keep cool. Sure you're all right? I've brought a week-end guest up to see you, dear. Hold on to her, Kate. It's good news, now mind you don't get shocked! He's here with Uncle Peter—and Mar——"

"Oh, blessed Jesus preserve and protect us——" prayed Maggie's voice steadily in the background. "Oh, my God——"

"Oh, John—John *Kelly!*" screamed Ellen. "Not *Tom*——? Oh Mama——"

"Tom," Kate said, laughing and crying with joy. "He's come home!"

CHAPTER XXV

TOM, TALL, HANDSOME, LAUGHING, with one arm tight about his mother's shoulders while he divided his affection and devotion among all the others, was really home again.

The fire was lighted, the children sent to bed, and Mollie, quite naturally and pathetically, and with a little meek triumph, taking the second place in importance, sat down on the davenport, and Tom sat close beside her. Mollie, as the greatest sufferer to his going, was naturally chief rejoicer at his return, and now and then she was tearful, and even occasionally faint, in the overwhelming joy of it.

The others ranged themselves about, their faces utterly radiant, their gay laughter always ready to meet anything and everything Tom said. John was in a big chair, Kate on its arm, with her body resting against him, his arm about her, and her own arm laid loosely about his neck.

Well! It was impossible of course to talk consecutively or coherently. Everything was hopelessly mixed together, Cecy's vocation, and the funny speeches of the Swedish deck-hand on the ship that had brought Tom into harbor that morning, and Kate's marriage, and glimpses of Bankok and Rangoon, unimportant gossip of the Prendergasts, and details of San Francisco's municipal life were tumbled out indiscriminately, and interspersed with personalities.

"Tom, dear, you *look* so well! He's fat, isn't he, Mommy?" "Well, you could of knocked me down with a quill pen——" "All the way up in the train Pop kept saying, 'Maybe your mother's got wind of it, somehow!'" —"I *saw* that third man, coming up behind John, and I thought, 'Oh, *pshaw,* some business stranger——'" "Well, Mollie, you look happy enough now, sure enough!"

Happy! Mollie was more than that. She was solemnly and supernaturally exalted. A sort of radiant pallor lingered on her full, soft face; she kept her hand tight in Tom's, and assumed a girl's air of pouting and coquetry when he left her side even for a moment.

He wasn't married? Somebody put the question jokingly, and he answered it with a laughing negative. And Mollie lapsed still deeper into content. And he wasn't going away again. Oh, good Lord, no! Home and Mother for him, from now on. How about his old room, Mom, and how about his old job, Pop?

"Mart has your job, and he's a wonder," John told him, smiling.

"Had," Martin amended neatly, with delicate emphasis.

"But we'll find you a job, never you fear!" John added, to Tom.

"You're not going to put anybody out for me!" Tom assured him. "I can loaf around awhile." Kate, struck by some sudden thought, stared at him suddenly, speculatively, sent a glance to Mart. But Mart was not looking at her, and she turned her eyes to Tom again.

"Do you know what our pay-roll now is, Tom?" Martin demanded, interestedly. They talked of the business, of the Riordan "boys" still in the packing room, and the way little O'Brien had come up. O'Brien married to a widow eighteen years older than himself, with four children? Tom's great shout of laughter broke forth again.

Mollie listened patiently to the business talk, as she had listened to it

for thirty years. Later, when at last they knew that they must separate for bed, she lingered on with him, and they talked of Paul.

Whirling sheets about, running to and fro with towels and soap, talking, talking, talking, Kate and Maggie and Ellen and Mart made comfortable provision for him.

"And sleep late if you can! Sunday we all have to get up at six-thirty, for the only Mass is at eight, ten miles away," Kate told him, when they were all delaying, and finding fresh excuses for one more word—and one more. "But tomorrow this is Liberty Hall!"

John, Peter, the old grandmother, Maggie, even Mollie had by this time disappeared. But the cousins lingered on in Tom's room, and now Tom, cousin-fashion, put his arm about Kate and kissed her.

"All right, you beauty. Does John tell you now and then what a heart-breaker you are?"

"Oh, now and then! The upper pillow's hard, Tom, in case you want to read in bed, and the lower's the one to sleep on."

"Read in bed! My God, I'm asleep on my feet as it is!"

"Well, I was thinking of tomorrow night, too!"

"Tom, when does your box come?" Ellen demanded.

"I don't know. Some time. Ellen's not so worse looking, is she, Kate?"

"Not when she's clean, no," Kate answered, in the familiar old phrase of Irish motherhood. "And the boys—kinder—like Ellen!" Kate said, with a laughing glance. "Ah, Tom, it's nice to have you back again!"

"Here I go!" Tom warned them, tearing off his coat. "Stay at your peril, females!"

Kate and Ellen fled, laughing. Kate found John still awake, in their own simple, pine-scented bedroom, with Rosemary sitting bolt upright and interested in the curve of his big pajama sleeve, on the bed.

"John Kelly! Do you wonder I can't ever train one of my babies? Look at her now! Oh, you bad girl——"

"She bust her water bottle, and her crib's in a mess," John explained.

"Oh, John," Kate's hand was at her heart. "She cut herself!"

"No, apparently not. I heard the smash, and caught her out of it before the thing fairly happened. I remembered poor Frank and his thermometer, when he was the baby——"

Kate, brisk, capable, superb, in her fresh, full blue gingham, hurriedly made matters right. John and the baby contentedly watched her as she smoothed and straightened, spanked the diminutive pillow, refilled a new bottle from the thermos one, and snapped the rubber top into place. The screen was replaced, the old steamer plaid hung upon it, and Rosemary whisked back into her crib.

"What about a little m-i-l-k?" John queried. "It's after one."

"Let's see how the water goes——" Kate droned, swiftly undressing. Later, when it had been ascertained that Rosemary had gone soundly off to sleep, like the good baby she was, Kate told John what she really thought of Tom.

"He's coarsened, somehow."

"Well, that might have been partly the clothes, Kate. He doesn't seem to fit into them yet. You should have seen him when he walked into the store! In a black shirt, with no tie, and the funniest looking checked suit—a sort of Norwegian blue—that I ever saw in my life! Uncle Pete and I took him out and fitted him up from head to foot."

"He's broke, I suppose?"

"No, apparently not. Although he let his father pay for everything, cheerfully enough. But he talked about having money—some money, on him. He got good pay; he was second mate, you know."

"John, does he remind you of any one?"

"Well, yes, I know what you mean. There's a funny likeness to somebody—I was wondering who it was. Those things strike you, after an absence, I suppose."

"I know who it is," Kate said. "Uncle Charley."

Her eyes and John's met squarely, and John laughed briefly.

"That sort of affectionate pompous way, it's Uncle Charley *over* again!" Kate pursued. "Lofty and superior—oh, my dear, I know it too well! I know what's kept Tom Cunningham wandering and drifting over the world for more than five years!"

"You're smart, Kate," her husband said, simply. "But you must remember there is a lot of drinking among sailors in seaport cities, and in the Orient," he reminded her. "He's home now, and he'll pull himself into shape in no time. Anyway, isn't it good to see how happy Aunt Mollie and Uncle Peter are?"

"Aunt Mollie said to me tonight," Kate said, "that it was worth it all! I wonder if the time'll come when she can say that about Paul, and Daisy, too? I say it, I know," Kate added, musingly, "when I pass the old Library, and remember myself drudging away in there, cooking suppers in that smelly storeroom—I'll never forget the time I left a banana in there, and had nine million ants trooping over the place!—and crying at night for fear I'd never have clothes and good times like other girls.

"My hands are terrible!" she interpolated, rubbing them with cold cream. "And stopping at Wiseman's for bread, can't I smell that little corner grocery yet!" she went on. "Old Wiseman grinding coffee, and the place smelling of onions, and that oily smell of the paper that comes around sugar barrels, and the old green and pink tea-boxes that said 'Suchong' and 'Best Mixed.' And I thank God for every moment of it—he's gone to sleep." Kate added, softly to herself, as John gave audible proof of deep slumber. "God bless him, he gets so tired! I wonder," she mused, composing herself on her own pillow, and stretching a hand for the little volume of Thomas à Kempis, "I wonder if I'm getting Aunt Mag's gift of the gab? Here I am talking away to myself——"

Tom, eventually to resume his old duties in his father's store, or such fragment of them as the increased business made expedient, was to have a long holiday first, finish the last of the summer months with Ellen and

Kate and his mother and the children, up in the mountains.

These were happy days for them all. Mollie grew younger, firmer, gayer visibly, under their eyes, and Peter's deep satisfaction in having Tom home again was secondary only to his delight in his wife's transformation. Grizzled, stout, simple, aged somewhat himself, Peter would sit regarding them in silent content for long minutes together.

"Something like, Mama?"

"Oh, Papa, if we can only be thankful enough!"

The children, at first won by the utter novelty of this brown and loudly laughing relative, presently restored their allegiance to Uncle Mart. Ellen, deep in a secret love-affair, at eighteen, gave him only the surface attention that her own burning affairs left free. But the other women surrounded him with a constant atmosphere of devotion.

In the soft fragrant mornings he helped his grandmother, who was scornfully attempting to establish some sort of a garden under the wild pines. Mrs Walsh had small patience with primitive frontier life. "They'll yell over a wild weed, mind ju," she said in an undertone to Tom, "that any Turk could pluck up out of the woods, and then set one of their big brogues smack on me little Lady Washin'tons!"

He helped Aunt Maggie, who satisfied her conscience under all this "imposition" on Kate's hospitality in the labor of making the young Kellys' endless rompers, by sitting beside her, with desultory fragments of his own story always ready to shock and amuse her. He was tender with his mother; she was once again the "Mollie" of his loving impudence.

But it was above all with Kate that he lingered, and the remembered fascination of her old girlish personality, and the fresh charm of the new, cast their spell strongly about him again.

"Where are you off to, Catherine Monica Gertrude Walsh Kelly?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, hear him remembering my old Confirmation names! I wonder I didn't take Rita and Gemma, too, and make a job of it! Where am I off to? I'm taking the French laundry, and these Turks of mine, and a couple of the Prendergast small fry, down to the village, for the mail, and some rock salt, and to have their hair cut, if the barber's not too busy, and to get Hong Kee some meat!"

"Me too!" Tom would suggest. Opening the hood of her motor-car capably, to inspect the engine with a menacing eye, Kate would grin at him hospitably, as he and the baby got into the front seat. She loved to have him go; she was the most gregarious of creatures. A crowd of her own people always meant a good time to Kate. "Let's *all* go!" was her motto, and although it might be to the dentist or to the dressmaker, it was always thus turned into a festivity.

"Oh, come on, Tom. That'll be fun! Now, the whole crowd of you get in the back there with Biddy, and take turns with the jump-seats. Yes, take the baby, Tom. I adore having her!"

Mollie might wander out, among the sweet pines and the little shabby wooden cabins. Fog usually lingered here in the warm, dreaming morn-

ings, the children wore their sweaters, the surface of the Lake was hid.

"Are you goin' with Kate, Tom?"

"I have to send a telegram, Mom."

"Oh, if that's all, you could 'phone it."

"The 'phome's bust again!" Mrs Walsh, straightening a cramped old back, and gesturing toward the main house largely, with a loamy trowel, might remind them.

"The 'phone's broken," Tom, ignorant of the fact until that instant, would repeat to his mother.

"If I'd known, I might of gone in with you," Mollie would reproach them affectionately, with her new little exacting air. "I like your gall, running off with my big boy, Kate!"

"I'm one of these dangerous married women, I tell you, Aunt Mollie! Did I smooch my nose, Tom?" She would bring her exquisite face, with the firm apricot color glowing in the cheeks, and rings of chestnut hair pressed down against her glorious, black-lashed blue eyes, close to his. "Was there ever anything in God's world as heavenly as that baby?" she would ask, simply. "Are you going to sleep in Uncle Tom's arms, you beautiful angel? Could your mother eat you at one big bite—these elastics are getting tight around her little legs, Biddy," Kate might add to the nurse, as unconscious of Tom's immediate proximity as the baby herself was. "She's getting to be such a monster!"

Playing with him, working with him, seeing him constantly, she studied Tom, and perhaps was surprised at what she found in him. At thirty he was still handsome, but there was a certain looseness, coarseness in his beauty now, a certain hint of fading already. There were fine lines about his eyes; he was pale, with a suggestion of dissipation in his pallor. He was an easy, pleasant egotist, contemptuous of domesticity, superbly impatient of the children's claims, not sincere even with his mother.

"You got out of that very nicely," he would congratulate Kate, as they drove away. And although she had been quite conscious herself of putting off Aunt Mollie, who was always willing to accompany them, even to intrusion, even to boredom, she did not like him to speak of it.

And he had lost his faith. It was all "bunk," it was all amusing hypocrisy, now. But this he did not let any one see, and he spoke of it only to Kate.

"You still keep all that up?" he said, good-naturedly, when she emerged from her own room, after the children's prayers, in which Mollie, Maggie, Ellen, and the old grandmother piously joined.

"Keep it up?" But she wouldn't let him see how shocked she was. Tom's was the usual attitude of the detached young man. The boys who married young got all their faith back, through their wives and nurseries. Tom's was a familiar type.

He mustn't be scolded, he mustn't be argued with. He would "come back" safely some day. Meanwhile one only smiled at him, only "gently admonished him."

"Tom, the women you love best in the world are religious women,"

Kate would remind him. And when he cut her to the heart with reference to organized religion, its commercialized side, its law-suits, its wealth, its worldly aims and pretenses, she only answered that all human undertakings are tarred with the same brush. "Look at the government, Tom, the schools, the railroads—abuse of power everywhere! If the affairs of the Church had been perfectly administered, we would have had the Kingdom long before this, wouldn't we?"

"They caught you young, Katie!" Tom would answer, laughing. Sometimes the thought of his contempt for the intelligence of praying women stung her, but not often. Poor Tom, whose life had been so pitiably thwarted and wasted, it was not hard to be generous to him!

"Katie, do you ever flirt?" he asked once, teasingly.

"Do I ever what?"

"Flirt. Have crushes."

Her beautiful face flushed indignantly.

"Tom, I *loathe* that kind of talk!"

"Then you're different from most women today, darling."

"I don't believe it! Flirt! I'd just as soon go back to dolls after having my own living dolls," Kate protested.

"That's your Irish blood," Tom observed, after thought.

"I don't know what it is, but I'd just as soon put another little boy in my Frank's place, or in Jimmy's place, as another man in John's," she said. And he knew that it was true. Kate's early married life was as much an advance upon her flirting days as they in their turn had been upon childhood. Her life was full. She had no wish to go back to the lesser thrills and doubts of courtship.

More than once they spoke of Babette. Tom had not seen her in all the years since the day when he set her down, in her thin brown linen frock, outside the crowding bloom of her mother's garden.

"My God, Kate, if you knew what I went through when I got her last letter!" he said one day. "It seems like a dream now. There've been other women since—there was a little widow I met in Sydney——"

Kate frowned faintly. She did not want to hear about the other women. Even to have them mentioned hurt Tom in her eyes. Coarse to want them—coarse to mention them, opening to her eyes a glimpse of a world of "sin." How horrible life could be!

"But she was the first woman I ever consciously loved," Tom added. "It could have been you, Kate—easily. You and I were all lined up for an affair when they packed me off to Paris."

"I suppose we were," she conceded, thoughtfully, with a surprised smile.

"Then I met her, and she—she knew the ropes, which neither you nor I did——" Tom continued, dreamily.

They were sitting upon a slippery carpet of pine needles, on a slope above the Lake. Through the rough trunks, and under the low tasseled branches, the still water shone blue—blue in the sunshine.

"I met the brother, George Garberg, the other day, and we had a chat.

'om presently continued, throwing a cone at a chipmunk, poised with pcurled bushy tail a few feet away. "She and Newman have been perectly happy; they have a little boy. They live in the East somewhere, Cincinnati, I think—I don't remember."

"Would you care to see her, Tom?"

"Oh, Lord no! I can imagine her. George said she was fatter—— Oh, Lord, life's funny!" Tom rolled over on his side, laughed, and began idly o toss sticks and cones toward the water.

"I almost died for her," he said. "I went down to the waterfront that ight, you know—the night I got her letter, and got rip-roaring drunk."

"You came to the Library first, you remember?"

He looked at her suddenly, surprised. He did not remember. "I did?"

"Oh, certainly you did!"

"I don't remember that. H'm! I don't really remember shipping—here were days and days at sea. I was sort of assistant cargo master. Sixty a month, I remember that. Kate, the feeling I had for that woman vas like a poison—I couldn't get away from it!"

"I can imagine." She only had to think of herself as separated from Frank, Jimmy, Rosemary—the frenzy of it. "My children—my children re in that burning house—let me by——"

She turned pale, in the sweet afternoon sunlight and peace under the ines, with the children and Biddy only a few feet away.

Or suppose the baby, Rosemary, were out on that relentless blue exanse of water—the little hand clutching, the little blue romper plunging nd struggling—Kate a poor swimmer—no rope——

Kate shuddered violently. "God!" she whispered, under her breath.

"Tom, it must have been terrible!" she said.

"Ah, you've no idea. Wherever I went I knew she wouldn't be there, nd it seemed to take the very heart out of me."

"But, Tom, you knew we were all so anxious—you knew Aunt Mollie vas grieving for you so——"

"I know. But it didn't seem to matter, somehow. I got to Rangoon, hipped again—I liked it, as far as that went. Then this old lad that was oing to Tahiti took me along—it was all more or less fun. If I had it ll to do over again I'd go on the wagon—that's what kept breaking me p. I had quite a lot of money at one time——"

"Well," Kate predicted with her sunny smile, "now we'll have you marrying some nice girl, one of these days, and settling down."

"We don't seem to be marryers, we Cunninghams," he answered, with n indication of an indifferent yawn. "Cecy a nun, Mart hanging round hat school-teacher of his—she'll never marry him——"

"Lizzie Daley?" Kate was interested. "Why not?"

"Well, she's older than he is, to begin with, and tied down to that old ather and mother of hers. She's cracked on religion, I imagine. Anyway, Mart said something about her making a novena about going on a picnic vith him——"

"Oh, Tom, she couldn't have!" Kate laughed, scandalized. "I don believe Mart can really be in love with such a—such a bony, coo looking, pious sort of girl," she added, uncertainly.

"No accounting for tastes," Tom said, airily.

"No," Kate agreed, in a more decided tone. "But it's you who wi have to marry, Tom, and give Uncle Peter grandsons," she added.

"All right," Tom consented. "You find me a wife half as lovely an smart as you are, Kate."

She only smiled maternally. His compliments made no impressio upon her whatsoever. Tom, appreciating this perfectly, nevertheless wa astonished afresh at the fact every day. She was not a worldly minde woman, not material in her ambitions, yet actual, tangible things seeme strangely to possess her nowadays. The Kellys were prosperous, Kate ha a great deal of money and authority, and she enjoyed the administratio of them. The spiritual side of her children's welfare was of first impor tance to her, but even that she took in a human sort of way, the goodnes and piety of the young Kellys was highly desirable, from a worldly poir of view—they must have it.

Of *course* little Frank and Jim and Rosemary were the sweetest, best mannered children in the world, wisely fed, charmingly dressed, mor fortunate than other people's children. And the goodness and prayer went with all this; Kate's life was quite unthinkable without the lovel fact of her holiness.

To the idea that any outsider, any man, be he as handsome and a charming as he would, might admire her in anything but a cousinly neighborly way, would not have shocked Kate, but it would have amuse her deeply, with a sort of scorn.

"The poor idiot! Doesn't he know that I'm married—— Take tha out of your mouth instantly, Jim, and bring it to Mother!" Kate migl have said. And her next speech would have been something like, "Aun Mollie, feel his forehead. Does he seem the least tiny bit warm, to you?

Even John, Tom realized with a sort of impatience and resentmen was no longer Kate's lover. He had been graduated, relegated to tl comfortable, unromantic position of "Daddy," a person to be deepl loved, innocently deceived as to the children's sins, babied and consulte alternately, managed every instant of his life from now on. Kate needc men in her life no longer; they were only admiring accessories now. N hint of passion would ever stir her again as did the mysterious disa pearance of Rosemary's Roman sash, or the rapturous prospect of picnic with all the children, on the shore.

A pity! he thought. She'd grow stouter now, and if she were sti scrupulously neat and clean in her dress, she would not be so careful t be pretty. Tom imagined the Kellys as the sort of simple devoted fol who take a troup of children in their teens round the world; they'd g to Lourdes and Rome and Lisieux, he thought, and curled his lip.

He pitied her. And all the more scornfully because he could read in er kindliness, her generous hospitality, her quick defense of him in any amily argument, that she pitied him.

"What have I done, to be so fortunate?" she would ask him, as they vandered idly after the children, through the summer woods.

"Oh, you're fortunate, are you?"

A quick flash of her maternal, smiling disapproval.

"Ah, Tommy, don't be naughty! You know I am."

"All right, if you like it," Tom conceded, in genial dissatisfaction. And e sometimes assumed a slightly superior and lofty air toward Kate and ohn, as a bachelor who had evaded all their humdrum responsibilities nd duties, as well as their spiritual inhibitions.

But actually he was better than his words. He went to church with his nother faithfully, dropping carelessly upon one knee beside her and eaning his handsome forehead upon his hand when the bell rang, and istened respectfully to the carefully planted stories of conversions and niracles that she and Allie arranged to bring under his notice. They felt hat their darling had only strayed away from his old childhood's faith n a superficial sense, and told each other that he would be the first to ight for it when occasion arose.

Tom had his old room, and in the autumn began to go down to the ffice every day. He had no special duties at first, but was merely feeling is way. And in October came the first break. Tom disappeared for three nxious days.

It was Uncle Charley, pompous and entirely adequate, who found him n a waterfront billiard room, consorting with a dreary company of erelicts, in a little parlor behind the supposedly closed bar, and who rought him to his grandmother's little cottage, and sent for Kate.

Kate got hold of Mollie at once, and Tom was transplanted to his own omfortable room, with a little touch of what Kate diagnosed as dengue ever. "Dengy fever" was thereupon added to Mollie's vocabulary, and overed many an awkward occasion gracefully.

For Tom was sensitive about these little breaks in the regularity of is life, and there was never any mention made of them before him. Mollie and Allie would gladly have died rather than hurt him as deeply s any reproach, as even the most tender allusion to his weakness would ave hurt him. And Peter, looking at the aging wife who so blindly dored her first-born child, and remembering Daisy and George and Paul, remembering Cecy in the convent, and that the years would surely ake Ellen and Mart away, fell in with the charitable conspiracy.

At intervals of ten weeks or three months Tom would grow moody, rritable, unlike his lovable self. Mollie saw it, Allie saw it, they whis- ered about it, they telephoned Kate. And Kate warmly, and quite asually, telephoned Tom. How about coming out to dinner, she and ohn were having a little party.

But Tom, after struggling darkly to answer her normally, and after

laughing and kissing his mother a little too noisily, and warning her to pull so doleful a face, would vanish again. And then they telepho Charley, who became immediately efficient, and promised to get hol the boy at once.

Mollie would telephone Tom's doctor, the silent, dark, clever Rol Costello, who had been an upper classman in Tom's freshman days. would turn down the big bed, see to ice and hot-water bottles, v anxiously—anxiously. One day—two days—that was nothing! telephone message might be Charley, saying that he and Tom were their way home. After three days, and Allie and Mollie took turn leaving the house, one always there on guard, the other to return bre less from church or shopping downtown.

"Did Charley telephone?"

"Not yet he didn't, Mollie. What is it, Nelly?"

"Mr Walsh is downstairs with Mr Tom, ma'am, and he says——"

Ah, the blessed relief of having him back again, of getting him c fortably into bed, of assuaging the first terrible onslaughts of headac and fever! Mollie and Allie could have sung for content as they pas each other in the halls. Another bout over, and who knew but what it' the last, or at least the last for a long, long time. They darkened room, went in and out noiselessly, tut-tutting gently when he moan sometimes smoothing the restless, tossing black head.

In twenty-four hours he could have black coffee, a bath, a shave. could sit up in bed, looking pale and broken. He could have the even newspaper, make Ellen laugh when she carried it in to him; he as for the new magazines. He played "Dominoes" with his doctor.

"Gosh, Mom, they certainly poisoned me that time!" Tom would s penitently, when Mollie came to sit beside him, sighing, and holding hand in her soft big one.

"Oh, but dar'rlin', why do you touch the stuff at all?"

"I don't know, Mom. I'm done now, for life. I don't like it, and I d need it. I could always leave it alone! But you know how it is, in a cro of fellows——? However, I'm *done*. Good-*night*."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say so, Tom!"

"Pop mad at me?"

"Oh, no, dear, for well he knows its the dengy fever in your ve that makes it so hard for you. I'll send him up!" And Mollie would away to find Pete.

"This is awfully hard on your mother, my boy," Peter, if he chan to be in a generous mood, would reproach his son mildly, taking the ch she had vacated.

"I know it, Pop, I feel rotten about it. But it sort of comes over Maybe when I've been home longer——"

But if Pete was intractable, panic held the big house.

"Pete won't go near 'um!" Mollie would breathe, agitatedly, to Al passing her in the hall.

Allie need make no answer. The situation soon became too familiar or need of words. Bad feeling between father and son, Pete's brow like thunder-cloud, Tom insouciant and ugly, conversation at meals almost ead, and the fear of an outbreak making the women's hearts beat in nunder-claps at the least untoward word.

This for two or three uncomfortable days. Then Tom's patient interest n his father's business, his unquenchable wit and fun, his voice at the iano, the accident of Kate and John coming to dinner, elaborately un-onscious that anything was wrong, would clear the sky again. And then or a few weeks, or a month or two, all would be well, and the handsome, ndifferent Tom Cunningham far more in demand socially than ever his teady-going brother was.

Martin was quietly, deeply in love with Lizzie Daley, a hard-working lain young school-teacher almost four years his senior. The affair so nraged Mrs Cunningham that she never mentioned it; Lizzie was nathema to her, she had not the slightest patience, and she pretended ot to have the slightest interest in the whole affair.

When Mart appeared at the dinner table sleek and freshly dressed, haved and brisk, intending, immediately after the meal, to see his girl, he only form of social initiative he ever developed, his mother was mag-ificently scornful.

"Oh, you're goin' out, are yu?"

"I guess so, Mom."

"It must be something very important, the way you've rigged up for ?"

"Lizzie." Martin would reach for a roll.

"Lizzie?"

"Lizzie Daley, Mother dear." Mart's young face would be a mask of atience and endurance.

"Oh, is Lizzie Daley," Mollie would ask, mildly and innocently curi-us,—"that's the Creels' cousin, that looks so pale as if she didn't eat ood,—is she having a party?" she would add, musingly. "You'd wonder school-teacher in the primary grades could afford to pay the price of ntertainin'——"

"Leave him alone, Mollie!" Tom might warn her, good-naturedly.

"Leave who alone?"

"Mart. You know he likes Lizzie!"

"Who does? Our Mart? But my goodness, she could almost be his nother, couldn't she? Wasn't she teaching ten years ago?"

"Oh, cut it out, Mom. That's not fair!"

"I don't mind it in the least," Martin might say, briefly, with a level lance. He had an extraordinary power of self-control, was far less notional than either Tom or Cecy, and possessed almost no sensitive-ess. The Walsh tendency toward garrulousness and excitability was ntirely absent from Martin; Mollie felt less affinity with him than with ny of her other children.

She resented Peter's dependence upon his reliability and judgment

"Wait until Ellen here makes up her mind, and I'll retire on m laurels, and you and I'll go to Rome, and call on the Pope!" Peter sai one day. "John'll be glad to put Mart in as second vice-president—Mar and Riordan practically run the city department and all the local busines now!"

"Mart!" Mollie said, sharply. "It's very funny to me the way you al bolster up that child! What's Tom to be doin' when all this fine managin comes to pass!"

"Oh, we'll find room for Tom, Mollie!" Peter assured her, good-naturedly. On the day this conversation took place she paid one of he rare visits to the offices and store; walking about in her friendly fashio among the staring clerks, many of whom knew her, and anxious to se "Mr Tom's office."

"Have you got 'um squeezed in here in Joe Riordan's place like th elevator boy?" she demanded, humorously, of John, who walked abou with her.

"Well, he's getting his bearings, Aunt Mollie. He's not sure yet wha he wants to do."

"Lucky you if you get 'um," Mollie said, with significance, to the elde Riordan. "He's got a head on him, that one." And to Martin, whos name was modestly lettered under Riordan's now on the door, she sai chidingly: "It don't look very good, Mart, your standing in you brother's way. Him with the dengy fever, and away from home so man years! You run things here to suit yourselves! I don't know what's com over Peter Cunningham that he'd let John Kelly and Mart have the sa of everything," was her final discontented murmur.

"Peter'll lose every red cent he ever put into the place, and bring u all to roon!" said Allie, upon this point anxiously, in a family conferenc later.

"Look at the Boyles," Maggie added, lugubriously. "Drivin' past i their carriage every day of the world, a matter of a few years back. An what'd he do but buy real estate somewheres! Now she has a sig 'Rooms—Table Board', in her bay window. God help the poor soul.

"Aggie Boyle had an ulster in her roof," old Mrs Walsh contribute animatedly, "and the doctor that she called in to see would he fix it to her that it was a little tumor she had. And this on the top of her mout mind ju, where every sup of coffee or tea she would be takin' woul make her lep like the Ould Boy himself——"

"And she says to the doctor that she'd have to go to the City an County for the operation," Maggie added, dolefully. " 'For,' she says, ' don't know where I'd get a lot of money for operations and dear know what,' and with that——"

"Don't *do* that, Maggie!" interrupted her mother, forcefully. "Whi I'm tellin' Mollie a thing, who is it but you that'll break in and bust th whole point of me story on me."

"Well, I was just thinkin' how rich the Boyles was, and how they come down in the world," Maggie answered, mildly, without resentment.

"Well, leave Peter Cunningham look to it, or he'll be in the same fix," was the final consensus of opinion, uttered heavily by Allie, who had been supported by Pete for all the almost sixty years of her life, yet who was keenly anxious and concerned for her bread and butter at irregular intervals.

Now she spent many a sleepless night worrying about it all. If Pete lost everything, then Kate's household went down to ruin, too, and what with Ellen dependent, and Mart made penniless by the common calamity, and this big house like a white elephant on their hands, and poor Tom unable to do anything regularly, why, what on earth would become of her?

Allie began to talk somewhat bitterly of the large sums of money she would have had comfortably salted away in the bank, had her years of faithful service been given for a salary, instead of for love.

"He'd pay a housekeeper sixty a month," she would tell Maggie. "Call it seven hundred a year, for I'd have to put somethin' in the plate, and pay my carfares. Seven hundred a year for thirty years, I'd have thirty—I'd have more than twenty hundred—wouldn't I have twenty thousand dollars to my credit? And what have I got? All I get is to say, 'Pete, have you a ten?' or 'Pete, I'm chargin' shoes to you——' Sure, I could buy flats, and live in the one, and rent the other, and do good."

"Kate sends us a check every month of her life," Maggie would answer proudly. "And John would no sooner be down than he'd be up again—he'll always be fair by us."

And wrangling comfortably back and forth, as to Peter's shortsightedness, and the probability of a financial crash, interspersed with odds and ends of gossip, the two would spend a comfortable afternoon.

CHAPTER XXVI

KATE, with her nursery flooded with sunshine and the laughter of little children, sparkling with flashing bathwater and spattering drops, strewn with small trays, bibs, porringers, pink blankets airing, and small rompers stretched on tiny hangers, answered her upstairs telephone with a dripping and hilarious baby rolled carelessly in a big crash towel and resting comfortably on her hip.

"You're speaking of Mr Cunningham? Tom Cunningham, you mean?" she said, presently, with a worried frown.

"No. Miss Cunningham," persisted the voice at the other end of the wire. Kate wondered why her unseen conversationalist stopped for something like a flicker of laughter.

"*Miss* Cunningham? Miss Ellen? But I thought you said this was the hospital? Here, take the baby, Biddy," Kate said to her nurse, her face

very grave. "Miss Ellen's been hurt and taken to the hospital—— Did you say she had been in an accident?" she asked, anxiously. "Is her mother there?"

"She's had an accident, but not serious, and she's at Saint Mary's, Biddy," Kate told the nurse, worriedly, hanging up the receiver. "I'm to see her, and tell her mother. My God, what a shock for my poor aunt! I've got to go straight to the hospital. I can't get hold of Mr Kelly—he went to Oakland this morning—— As if Aunt Mollie hadn't *enough* to worry about——!"

With her heart sick with fear, she was swept away from the joyous scene of little Rosemary's ablutions, from the white cribs and woolly bears, the toddling children and the delicious morning duties, to the big clean wards of the sanitarium.

Ellen hurt? But it somehow didn't feel true. Kate walked into the little office, loosening her furs as she went, and asked, with a whitened face, for Miss Cunningham's nurse.

The undergraduate nurse who was at the desk looked at her with sudden, but not pitying or sinister, interest, and remarking mildly that "Sister" wished to see her, disappeared. Immediately Kate found herself confronted by the capable directress, whom she slightly knew.

"Come in here, Mrs Kelly," said the nun. And when Kate had followed her into a clean little empty waiting room she asked with a keen look: "Had you any idea that your cousin was ill?"

"Ill? Why—but no! Isn't this extraordinarily sudden?" Kate stammered. "Isn't my aunt with her? She was at home last night, I know!"

"You didn't know, Mrs Kelly," the other pursued, "that Ellen—I've know her for years, you know, she had her tonsils out here—that Ellen was married?"

"Ellen Cun——" Kate sat down. She shut her lips, swallowed, and put one hand over her mouth, dazedly.

"She was married to Doctor Costello last Easter, more than ten months ago," the other woman explained.

"Married to Robert Costello! *Ellen!*"

"Yes, they said nothing about it—I don't know why," Sister Stephen went on. "But this morning at about eight she entered the hospital, and at nine her little girl was born. She had no complications, everything went smoothly. I didn't identify her until I peeped in, on my regular round, half an hour ago. She had been asleep—— I'm afraid this is a shock to you," the sweet, sexless voice broke off to say, sympathetically.

"Well, Sister——*shock*——" Kate echoed, faintly. "Well, *that*—" she said, in a mere breath of a voice—"*that* beats anything I ever heard in the entire——*Ellen!* Ellen Cunningham married! Why, but she's only eighteen! She'll not be nineteen until April!"

"I knew she was very young," the nun agreed, pleasantly.

"Young! But not one of us had the slightest *inkling* of this!" Kate stuttered. "My aunt will be—— But really I don't know what she'll do!"

"I talked to Mrs Costello——" began the directress.

"I thought his mother was dead—she is dead!" Kate said, amazed, in the pause.

"I mean Ellen," smiled the nun.

"Mrs Costello—Ellen! Holy Mother protect us!" Kate murmured.

"I talked to her, and she is very happy—very confident. She wants *you* to tell her mother," the other woman went on. "And as it is apt to be a good deal of a shock to Mrs Cunningham, perhaps it would be as well for you to speak to her."

"Oh, may I see her?" Kate's face was bright with sudden interest. "And the baby?"

"For a few minutes. It probably will quiet her down, although I must say," said Sister Stephen, "that she shows very few signs of strain."

She piloted Kate upstairs, and Kate tried to persuade herself that it was not all a dream: the clean, steam-warmed halls, the bright winter sunlight glimpsed in long airy wards, the wrappered man wheeled by her, the whiffs of green soap, ether, early luncheon trays. A child's acid wail drifted from beyond a closed door; "temper," thought Kate, instantly classifying it. "But he probably has had enough to put a saint into a temper, poor mouse!" she added, in her sympathetic heart.

A white door in a row of white doors, a darkened room, a straight, exquisitely lean young figure stretched under a spotless linen sheet. Ellen——!

"Kate—you adorable angel——"

"Well, Ellen——" Kate said in the last tone of utter stupefaction. She tumbled furs, bag, gloves on a chair, sat down, and dropped her hand over Ellen's hand. Words failed her.

"Kate, are you surprised?"

"Surprised! What on earth do you *think* I am?"

"Kate, did you see my daughter? Five pounds lacking half an ounce. Not so bad, considering that she wasn't supposed to arrive until March, and this is January. Take a peek at her as you go out!"

"Sweetheart," Kate said, gently, utterly bewildered. "Does Aunt Mollie know anything of this? Am I to tell them? We must talk, for they'll turn me out in a minute."

"Oh, no, they won't," Ellen returned, confidently. "Not until I say so. I can't have another pillow until day after tomorrow, but I'm perfectly grand. Don't worry about *me*. I've had tea, and I'm going to have oyster stew tonight. If you knew how tickled I am to have it all over—I was dreading the last few weeks, when you're so uncomfortable! And my dear, every time Mama or Aunt Allie looked at me these last months, I've nearly gone through the floor!"

"Ellen, for heaven's sake, tell me when you were married!" Kate begged.

"Well," Ellen commenced, with enjoyment. "You knew Rob had a crush on me? Oh, my dear, when I wasn't but sixteen years old, and was

engaged to Jimmy Dale, at school, it began. Rob simply—well, it was love at first sight for *him*. He was over there at the hotel, and they called him in, and there he was! I was crazy about Jimmy, and I asked Rob to take me driving—he was thirty-two then, you know, he seemed old to me—and let me see Jimmy! He wouldn't do that, but he was awfully nice and sympathetic. Well! So then up at the Lake, when Jimmy acted so silly, and we didn't like each other any more, Rob began to come over to our camp now and then, to 'see Tom'!" Ellen finished, with a significant laugh.

"I remember hearing him mentioned," Kate said.

"His aunt, you know, whose husband and two boys were drowned before her eyes," Ellen continued, indifferently, "has brought him up. She was a little nutty, I guess; anyway, she made him absolutely," Ellen widened her eyes, "absolutely gunshy of girls!" she added. "He couldn't marry while she lived, and she didn't die until a week ago."

"Oh, she's dead, is she?"

"Oh, yes, now she is. But meanwhile, one day last spring, just after Cecy entered, when Mom and Mart and I were up at camp for Easter, I was in Truckee waiting for a train, and Rob had just arrived, on his way to his aunt's camp. So we got talking, and I told him I was cracked about him, and he—" Ellen reddened, dimpled, raised explanatory eyebrows, "he talked," she summarized, briefly. "So we got our license, right then and there, and were married that afternoon; three days after my eighteenth birthday, and everything was fine! We said we'd take a chance about anybody finding out, and nobody ever did. And the fun!" Ellen added, brightening, "visiting places together—and twice he stayed with us overnight, and nobody suspected! And then all winter we lunched together whenever we could—his aunt was dying, and we thought she'd surely die before this happened!" And Ellen indicated her hospital room with an eloquent shrug and glance.

"But, darling, your father and mother will be furious—will be so hurt ——" Kate suggested, reproachfully.

"It can't be helped, Rob says," Ellen responded, cheerfully. "Oh, Kate, if you knew how excited I'd be last winter," she broke off, amusedly. "Mama telling me not to flirt, and to be a little lady, and perhaps the hostess chaperoning away like mad—and all the time a married woman! We were both on a few house-parties, in Oakland at the Deanes', and in Piedmont—it's been perfectly peachy!" Ellen ended, ecstatically.

"Ellen, darling, what a silly mad thing you've done!" Kate said, tenderly. "Where on earth is Doctor Costello today?"

"Ah, well, that was the funniest part of it!" Ellen said, gaily. "You know he was up at the house last night, and he and I and Mart and Tom were playing 'Five Hundred.' Tom thinks he comes to see him! He went off to Los Angeles at ten—his aunt died there, and she's left him tons of money. She never had the faintest suspicion, so now it's *all* right,"

Ellen said, with satisfaction. "And the minute he got back, which is day after tomorrow, we were to tell you all!"

"But, darling," Kate said, regretfully, "your mother will never forgive him! Why, he's twice your age! I can't think what possessed an honorable man, and a doctor, and an old family friend, to do such a thing! It was so unnecessary."

"It wasn't unnecessary at all," answered Ellen, who to Kate's dull astonishment—for Kate began to feel herself what she afterward described to John as a "saturate solution of shock"—was now manicuring her pretty hand idly as she talked. "You know the way Mom acts about everything! Look at her with Tom, and with Mart and Lizzie! There would have been fuss and flurry for five years. And Rob's aunt," Ellen concluded, peacefully, narrowing her eyes to inspect the fingertips she stretched at arm's-length along the bed, "would have found out, and she never would have stood for that! So it was the only way!"

"Well, if Aunt Mollie'll only forgive you——" Kate pursued, still anxious.

"Eventually she will!" Ellen said. "Kate, do make them show you Patricia! I'm going to name her Patricia—don't you think that's cute? Is five pounds pretty small? She's two months ahead of her appointment with me—she's a prompt little thing, I'll say that for her."

"Ellen, how did you get here?"

"Nothing simpler. I woke up at six, and began to feel funny. So I lay there thinking how I'd tell Mama. And suddenly it came to me that this was the place for me, and I got dressed and walked out. You see, they can't all get at me here. If Mom makes a fuss they'll turn her out. I passed Grace downstairs, dusting—this was about half-past seven—and told her to tell Mom I'd gone to church, and would have breakfast with you."

"Mrs Costello——" the nurse said, pleadingly. She was a pretty young nurse, and evidently highly delighted with Ellen's achievement.

"Ellen, you're wonderful!" Kate had to say, departing. So pretty, so cool, in her impudent little Chinese silk pajamas, as gay a little mother of eighteen as a sunshiny winter morning ever saw. "You should have seen *me* with my first baby. Sixteen hours of the inferno, ether, collapse, preparations for a better world——!" Kate said.

"Oh, they gave me something to sniff!" Ellen returned. "But before I really got excited I heard Patricia cursing like a little trooper, and then everything was glorious! Now, Kate, write down Rob's address, and wire him, and break it as gently to Mom as you can; she'll blow up, but it can't be helped. She'll make Papa swear not to come and see me, but you tell him on the side that I want him to sneak out here and take a peek at his grandchild. I was going to name her Mary Peter, but Rob said it sounded nutty to him. Take a look at her, Kate, and jack them up if they're neglecting her! She's Rob over again, from the one look I got."

Kate, out on the sun-washed flight of steps again, stood staring for

several long, bewildered minutes at the rounded twinkling tree-tops of the long Park front, the motor-cars flashing busily to and fro, the street-cars humming and throbbing, and marketing and baby-wheeling women gossiping in the pleasant winter sunlight.

Life, to a healthy young woman who had time to spare from her own for the problems of others, could be fascinating, Kate thought. Safe, snug, and warm, behind her, was Ellen Cunningham Costello, placidly anticipating oyster stew, and the diminutive, yet healthily snuffling and saffron-red Patricia beginning what might be a life as long and as changeful as Grandma's.

And ahead, the big Howard Street mansion from which a little daughter had escaped "to church," a few hours ago, proceeding peacefully upon its morning way; blinds drawn, furniture dusted, maids murmuring in the dining room; Aunt Mollie ponderously padding into the sewing room; Maggie, who was sewing for a few days for Mollie, arresting the busy treadle of the machine to gossip; Allie basting together the strips of gilt braid and heavy moire silk that would some day be vestments.

"To a telephone office, and then to Mrs Cunningham's, Jerry," Kate said to the chauffeur, her manner still absent, her tone vague. How to begin, she pondered, as the car began to move. Aunt Mollie, I have some very funny news for you? Aunt Mollie, what do you think has happened?

Actually in Aunt Mollie's big room, where Aunt Maggie was giving her sister a shampoo, Kate thought of a better method.

Mollie was in a big chair, looking up meekly, as Maggie tossed the thin gray locks on a big towel. Allie sat on the foot of the bed, detailing the last hours of a mutual friend.

"So Frances went over on the Thursday, to see could he keep it down," Allie was saying. "An' she took a cup of it in to him, and she says, 'Papa, it's my chicken broth——' Hello, Kate."

"Well, Kate, what brings you out at eleven o'clock?" Mollie asked, through thin strings of drying hair. "That's what Doctor Mhoon would forever say to me, if he'd meet me downtown," she added. " 'You the mother of young children,' he'd say, 'and stravagin' the streets before the shadders turn.' "

"That was a great expression of my Uncle Tom's," Allie contributed, smiling fondly. " 'The turn of the shadders' was for ever the way he'd say 'afternoon.' "

"Listen, good people," Kate said, brightly. "How does it happen that not one among the whole crowd of you has noticed that Dr Robert Costello has been falling in love with Ellen?"

Mollie flung back the wet hair, stared at her heavily.

"Rob Costello and Ellen?" she demanded. "Why, whatever's come to you, Kate?"

"Doctor Costello?" Allie demanded, also incredulous to the point of

pity. "Why, all he ever comes here for is to see poor Tom, when the dengy fever's upon him."

"Well," Kate said, hardily, "you're a bright lot, and I've some news for you!"

"I thought you had," said Mollie, significantly, with a look that embraced Kate's figure in its loose fur coat, as well as Kate's radiant face. "And I'm surprised at you! You've only just got your stren'th back, after the last——"

"Oh, it's not me this time!" Kate answered, laughing and flushing. "Although I didn't think anybody was going to be surprised any longer if it were! But it's Ellen——"

"Her and Robert Costello?" demanded Mollie. "Why, he's older than Tom. He's all of thirty-five."

"Twict her age. It's all foolishness," Allie said, disapprovingly.

"Oh, now don't say that, Aunt Allie!" Kate began, eagerly. "If they love each other! He's tremendously prosperous, and absolutely straight and respected."

"He's a dark-spoken, sour one for you," Maggie offered, simply. "You'll never get a bright word out of *him!*"

"His mother died on him when he wasn't but a young boy of three days," Allie recalled, "and it's made him very dry and cold. 'Another time, consult me,' he'll say, very bitter and sharp to me, if maybe I carried Tom up a taste of crab salad or whatever! 'Oh,' I'll say to him, 'didn't old Doctor Pawlicki, that you got your first trainin' with, remark to me that a natural-born nurse is worth ten of you young doctors with your diplomas and your little chin-beards.' "

"Oh, come now," Kate pleaded, "he's a fine fellow. And if Ellen loves him——?"

"Loves him?" Mollie echoed, roundly, with scorn. "A lot that young one knows about love! I'll have her over my knee if there's much more of this."

"Well," Kate said, in the silence, with her spirits rather damped. "This was as much a surprise to me as to you, I assure you. How we've all been so blind I can't see! But the truth is that Ellen and Doctor Costello were married awhile back——"

"My God in heaven!" Mollie whispered, as she paused.

"Yes, indeed they were!" Kate went on, glad to be getting it said. "They've been keeping it secret for months."

"Katie—don't fool her—look at her!" Maggie besought her niece, glancing at Mollie, who had indeed turned deathly white.

"Why, but gracious!" Kate said, with a cheerful, half-impatient laugh, "there's nothing so terrible in *that!*"

"Pete'll shoot him in his tracks!" Allie predicted, in a tone of quiet conviction.

"There'll be blood shed over it," Maggie agreed.

"God forgive him, for I never will!" Mollie added, solemnly. "The

one girl I had left, when God took away my little Daisy, and Cecy went off on me. Her father'll have the law on him, and if the Pope himself has to cancel the whole thing, it'll be done when Pete Cunningham gets started, let me tell you!"

"Now, Aunt Mollie dearest, be reasonable. I think it was a silly thing to do," Kate argued, kneeling now, with her arms about the straining figure of her aunt; "all secret marriages are absolutely idiotic! But there was his aunt, you know, that old Mrs Tobin, who left him dear knows how much money, and was a little crazy, I believe. Anyway, he didn't dare risk marrying while she was alive. And then Ellen being so young——"

"In the first place, it's all a lie!" Mollie said, in a loud, clear voice. "The idea of a feller like him, with a face like a rock on him, tellin' you such a story! Where's Ellen? Somebody 'phome Pete, and leave us get to the bottom of all this shenanagan!"

"Ellen and Rob Costello slipped off to Truckee one day last spring, you remember, after Cecy entered, when you were camping up there a few days with Mart, to get in the Easter vacation?" Kate continued her story. "And ever since, I imagine she's been trying to tell you—but you know what a funny little thing she is! Lately," Kate added, impressively, "she's had a very good *reason* for wanting you to know."

"Oh, Kate, never say that!" Maggie pleaded, faintly. "Roonin' the child before she's fairly grown up."

"Ruining nothing!" Kate echoed, staunchly. But she was frightened at Mollie's stricken face. "Whether it was a wise way to do it or not, there's no reason why they shouldn't get married! They went to a priest, and as far as I can see, Ellen doesn't care for anything in the world except her husband. She was as calm as a clock this morning!"

"God knows it's hard to bury them," Mollie was beginning, in a hard droning voice, her eyes fixed straight ahead of her upon space, her plump hands upon her knees, her full, faded face somehow made more pathetic by the dangling, still damp hair. "But I'd rather see a child of mine laid out in her shroud——"

"Oh, Aunt Mollie, *don't* take that attitude!" Kate protested. "There's nothing disgraceful about it! Ellen has her senses, she's perfectly capable——"

"Don't defend her, Kate, she's rooned her own life, and disgraced her family!" Maggie chided her niece sharply.

Mollie lay back in her chair with closed eyes.

"Katie——" she whispered, long pauses between her words. "Only tell me, dear, that—that what you said—about—— Say that's not true, Kate! That the last one the Lord spared me—an innocent child—wasn't lyin' and deceivin' her mother all these months——"

"Darling, she's happily married, and I just telephoned Uncle Pete on my way here to come home and congratulate you!" Kate said, steadily, in a reproving and bracing tone. "Why, Aunt Mollie, I never saw you

so silly! Now, just *come out of it,"* Kate directed her forcefully, "and begin to use your good sense! Do you realize that Ellen's dear little girl was born this very morning, and that she's waiting for you——"

"And at that," said Allie and Maggie, telling the story a thousand times, afterward, "Mollie turned the color of lard, and fell back kind of, against the chair, and Pete come runnin' into the room. 'She's killed her mother!' he said to Kate, and Kate took it upon herself to lay into the whole crowd of them. 'You're acting like a pair of fools, savin' your presence,' she says. 'Here's Ellen got a good man for herself, and a fine baby——'

"But indeed," Maggie and Allie would finish mournfully, "husband or no husband, child or no child, Mollie'll never forgive the either of them! Her heart's broke entirely on her. 'Never speak her name to me again,' she says. And when poor Tom come home sick the next week, didn't she have us send for Doctor McCarthy?"

The parents of Patricia Costello, however, took the attitude of Ellen's mother with a light-hearted indifference that secretly astonished Kate. It was hardly believable that a child could have had the devotion and care that had been lavished upon Ellen, for the eighteen years of her life, and so readily and simply be severed from the source of it.

Peter, after a week's painful mental struggle, and directly against the command of his wife, went out to the hospital to see his daughter and grandchild. He never told Mollie.

He sat clumsy and gentle beside Ellen, and Ellen laughed exultantly, and kissed his hairy, freckled, kind hand, and nursed her baby quite unembarrassedly before him.

"Want to see her choke?" Ellen asked him. "She's too cute when she chokes!"

And Kate saw that her own agonies of anticipation, where Ellen was concerned, were all wasted. Her mother would presently forgive her, and until then Ellen would be entirely happy, and only a shade happier afterward. She already regarded her parents as delightfully old-fashioned and somewhat mistaken guides. Rob was her life now.

But before this Doctor Costello had duly arrived in the city, and had been whirled out to his wife's bedside. He gave Kate, who chanced to be with Ellen, an unfriendly and resentful look, and proceeded hotly to find fault with the way Patricia had been dressed, and with the fact of her too-early arrival.

Ellen lay grinning at him blissfully. She knew that this was Rob's way of proving that his heart had been torn out of his body with cruel anxiety and strain, and that she, Ellen, was the dead center of his universe.

"There's no question that you did it running upstairs!" said Doctor Robert, sternly.

"None whatsoever, darling, I wanted to have a surprise ready for you!" Ellen answered, impudently.

"Oh, Baby Girl—Baby Girl—what a scare you gave me!" Kate heard the usually composed and cold man sob, as he sank on his knees beside Ellen. She slipped away. Ellen, she reflected, returning to her own household with the inevitable happy sense of going back to the sweetest place in the world, Ellen was like a little actress immersed suddenly in a new part. She retained but a dreamy and hazy memory of other responsibilities, and earlier days.

Ellen was in the position of the extremely youthful bride whose husband merely assumes the completion of her education, and a sort of transference of control. It was all a delicious joke to her. Her new name and dignity, her accounts at the big shops, her baby, her husband, her limousine, were simply larger toys to Ellen. She blindly adored her somewhat taciturn, reserved mate, but more than that she admired, respected, and obeyed him. She trusted to his advice in everything, and lived merely to have Rob cuddle her and praise her.

Ellen presently had a house in Jackson Street, and servants, and a white perambulator over which Kate's old Biddy, who would deal no longer with the uproarious young Kellys, and pleaded for a "young infant that can't run all over the place on me," presided proudly. Kate saw her almost every week, her father infrequently, and her brothers only now and then, when they could run out to have tea in her beautiful drawing room, and feel themselves decidedly superfluous if the dark, silent, busy doctor happened to come in.

But Mollie never saw her, never mentioned her, except with quiet tears, and predicted darkly that the entire enterprise would come to grief, and "Peter be only too glad to pay their bills for the poor creatures, and give them a start somewhere, without all this talk of limousines and servant girls and what not!"

Ellen, however, whose personality had perhaps been overshadowed in the old home full of vigorous brothers and sisters, now rapidly developed a sunshiny egoism that saved her from any pin-pricks of Mollie's inflicting.

She always waited to have dinner with Rob, and if the cook didn't like the delay, the cook could go. She always drove Rob out to the hospital on operating mornings, and if Patricia didn't want to wait for a meal, she knew what she could do! "You can lump it, Miss!" Ellen, fumbling unhurriedly with the white ruffles at her breast, would assure the wailing baby cheerfully. She would not leave the city, for the cold, blowy months of midsummer, because Rob could not get away. And she proposed calmly to wean the baby in September, and leave the child behind while she and Rob went off for a month's holiday in the car.

"Yes, and you could learn a lot from her!" John Kelly goodhumoredly assured his wife, when Kate reported this, as she did everything, to him.

"Yes, I know, I suppose I'm a fool about the children," Kate admitted, meekly. She was lying flat in bed, with Rosemary planted with some

small toys in the curve of her arm, and she now tipped her up, kissed the sole of a bare foot, and righted the baby, who had given but one surprised squawk, again.

"Ellen will never get *her* husband up at two in the morning, to drive six miles for a doctor, to come out of his good warm bed and tell her the child is snoring!" John said, significantly.

Kate laughed guiltily.

"The point is," she said, following some previous line of thought, "when this thing here is eighteen, and puts us over some high jumps, will we act as silly as Aunt Mollie?"

"I confess," John said, in the next interval of his shaving, "that I am at a loss to understand your Aunt Mollie! What satisfaction she gets out of being mad at Ellen—mooning about that big house of hers crying about Daisy and Paul and all the rest of it."

"What satisfaction does anybody get out of a family fight?" Kate asked, sensibly, setting little lambs in a staggering line on the bed. "Yet look at the people that have them! It's a silly sort of pride, I suppose, and, if you ask me, I think it's particularly Irish! Look at the Daleys—Joe's wife and Richard's haven't spoken to each other since the big Bazaar, and I suppose they never will. And what about? Because Rose had the ice-cream booth, and Helen asked if she couldn't have cones over by the grab-bag for the children! And look at the Dempseys—old man Dempsey never spoke to Gerald again just because he married at all, he didn't care *who*. And the Prendergasts have a brother they never mention, because it seems an uncle died, leaving them each a thousand dollars, and this brother had a will leaving everything to him, and didn't produce it until the others had made all their plans! And Mrs Nolan was telling me the other day at the Sodality that Mr Nolan had two sisters who got around the mother when she was dying, or something, and had her change her will—I didn't get it all——

"But Aunt Mollie's interested enough in it all!" she added, after a silence. "She cross-examines me about Ellen almost every day! You'd die to hear the scornful voice she puts on. 'Oh, is that *so?* She'll risk the child's life so that she can run off with him on a trip?' she'll say. But really, when I think of the way she interfered with poor Tom, and of what a pathetic failure *he's* made of life——!"

"Well, come now, he wouldn't be one speck happier married to his grass-widow," John suggested.

"Oh, I don't mean that—well, yes, that too! But years ago when he was my beau——"

"You say," John answered, delicately accenting the pronoun.

"They packed him off to Paris," Kate resumed, undisturbed, and conceding only an indulgent smile to his incredulity. "He came back madly in love, he got no sympathy, no help. Aunt Mollie didn't fill the house with youngsters, as *I* should do."

"A lot of good that would have done!" John interpolated.

"Meanwhile," Kate went on, now merely thinking aloud, and with no reference to her audience. "Meanwhile, poor Cecy falls madly in love with a man absolutely out of her circle—not to say class!"

"Well, Aunt Mollie couldn't help that."

"I think she could. I don't think Cecy should have been allowed to go down to San Mateo, to get mixed into that crew! You never will!" Kate assured the baby. "It came very near ruining Cecy's life," she added. "And now look at Aunt Mollie with poor Mart! Here he is deeply in love with a perfectly decent girl, and Aunt Mollie won't have her name mentioned!"

"Well, Aunt Mollie's simply become a crank, that's the long and short of it!"

"I don't think so. All mothers seem to act that way!"

"All mothers," John deduced neatly, "are cranks."

Kate stared long and thoughtfully at her daughter, and sighed.

"Yes, but that's not the answer!" she said, presently, half to herself.

CHAPTER XXVII

Mollie's attitude, on the occasion of Martin's wedding, was entirely characteristic. She showed a sort of magnificent disdain of the whole proceeding, mingled with a weary resignation.

Ellen, at the cost, as she told Kate later, of a scene with Rob, was at the church, and for a short while at Kate's house afterward, for the wedding breakfast. Rob could not come—too busy. Tom, genial and kindly, was his brother's best man, and Mollie had a new plum-colored silk gown and a hat handsomely ringed with purple ostrich tips.

The spring morning streamed with rain; the church was swept by gray veils of it, and a steady dripping filled in all the interstices of the service. Lizzie Daley, never a pretty girl, but rather one who was usually described as "sweet-looking," was ghastly in heavy mourning. Bereft, in one short year, of both the adored parents for whom she had slaved all her life, Lizzie was actually dazed, and had developed under the burden of bewilderment and grief a sort of stubborn endurance and quiet, baffling to everyone, even to Kate, whose house guest she was for a week before the ceremony. Martin, too, as Kate's eyes saw clearly, found the dumb resignation of his wife-to-be, her lifeless acceptance of all the sudden upheavals and readjustments, puzzling.

Kate had tried to coax her out of the wearing of mourning at her nuptial Mass. But Lizzie, turning an apathetic eye upon her hostess, only answered mildly: "It was a vow I took, Kate, that I'd wear black for a year after my mother and father died."

Of Mollie's captious attitude Lizzie took no note, because she took note of nothing. She cried a good deal, and submitted rather than agreed to the plans that were made for her.

These Martin had carried with a high hand. Lizzie's mother had died late in May. It was now early summer; Lizzie should give up her teacher's position in June, when the term ended. She must close her flat; house-hunt with him for an apartment whose associations would all be happier. The dreary rooms, where her parents had been dying for years, should be put behind her for ever.

Watching him, Kate marveled at the mystery called love. What power held him to this lifeless girl with the long veiny hands and the mournful whining voice? Mart was handsome, prosperous, clever, rich; why was it that he was the one to plead, to woo, to adore, and that Lizzie should always have the air of attempting to withdraw, to cool his ardor, to evade him?

Lizzie was tall and thin; she had an intelligent, serious face, pale blue-gray Irish eyes, and a sweet, tender, tremulous mouth already chiseled by suffering well borne. Melancholy hung about her like a visible veil. While Kate displayed the beauties of her simple trousseau, and while Martin sat raptly admiring her, Lizzie quavered forth, over and over again, the bitter story of the night that "Mama" had felt so badly, and had suggested sending for the doctor, and that she, Lizzie—blind, blind, blind!—had tried to coax her off to sleep again without summoning him.

"Oh, Kate, if I could only have that chance over again!"

"But, my darling! Look what you had been to them both, just an *angel*—all your life. You mustn't go back and brood that way. We all can blame ourselves into insanity, at that rate! Look at poor Aunt Mollie with Paul, and with Daisy, too, for that matter. Your mother didn't die, then, and the doctor said the next day that if he *had* come——"

"Yes, I know! But I'll always see her lying there, when I thought she was asleep. I was saying the five sorrowful, and I didn't dare rattle the beads for fear of waking her! I laid them on the table, and I'd just move my finger on them from bead to bead. And all the while she was wide awake, and suffering that cruel pain!"

"Lizzie dear, you mustn't be morbid about it. Now, when you're going to marry a dear, good man who idolizes you."

"Martin says he thinks I ought to get married," Lizzie would submit, in a doubtful tone.

"Yes, and I think you ought to, too. You and he know each other well; you've been friends all your lives."

"I don't know whether I love him the right way," Lizzie said, dubiously, once.

"You don't know anything now. Your heart's too sore. But you knew it a year ago, didn't you? Before your father died?"

"Oh, sure," Lizzie answered. "We were engaged."

"Well! Isn't that enough?" But seeing the vague look return to Lizzie's eyes, and presently hearing the details of the terrible illnesses again, Kate would begin to feel a chilly little touch of doubt. *Was* it enough?

Martin, however, had no doubts. He was doggedly set upon winning

his cool, tearful, sad-voiced wife. He packed his home belongings cheerfully, whistling under his breath, and made his arrangements at the office for a three weeks' holiday. He rented a sunshiny apartment in Sacramento Street, and dragged the apathetic Lizzie from one furniture store to another, buying blankets, kitchen utensils, rugs, with a definiteness and enthusiasm that made the women of his family secretly marvel. He opened accounts for Mrs Peter Martin Cunningham at grocery, butcher, and dry-goods store.

"It would be funny, if it wasn't somehow so pathetic!" Kate, visiting her old grandmother, and discussing the ceremony, said on Mart's wedding-day. "I'd talked Lizzie into wearing white, you know,—just a white muslin she happens to have. Well! This morning, when I got up, I peeked into her room, and she was up, all dressed—this was seven o'clock, and the wedding was at nine!—and of course, in heavy black, saying her prayers. I *couldn't* argue for white," Kate added, "with the rain simply sluicing down! It was worse than this."

The old grandmother, Kate, Maggie, Allie, and Mollie were all in the old kitchen of the Walsh cottage. Charley Walsh was at home, submerged in his dark, odorous bedroom, sometimes snoring, sometimes moaning with headache, and the women lowered their voices out of consideration for him. Harry, however, had a job in Portland, Oregon, and was, as his mother said simply, "doin' elegant."

At twelve o'clock in the morning the electric lights were lighted, for the spring storm was really of unusual violence and darkness. Kate had had Mart's wedding breakfast at her house, but somehow the little group of fifteen persons had failed to rise to anything like genuine wedding mirth. The bride had refused eggs, saying that everything "hearty" had "gone against her" since her mother died, and had sat silently and nervously sipping coffee, her black gown made even more funereal, Kate thought, by the large bouquet of violets and lilies-of-the-valley she carried. Ellen had left them at the table to be at home before Rob awakened; Thursday was his lazy morning. Mollie had surreptitiously wept, and Peter seemed dull and elderly.

It was upon Tom and Kate, and the always friendly and amiable John, that the real burden of sociability fell, and they struggled courageously with it. But it was a relief to everyone when Martin, glancing at his watch, warned Lizzie that they must be going, and when the married pair were escorted down the dripping steps under the big umbrellas John and Tom carried. They were to take an eleven-o'clock train from Third and Townsend streets, everyone knew, and Kate thought that if everything about the forlorn event had not been pathetic, Mart's little mystery as to just where he was to take Lizzie for the wedding night would have been supremely so.

When they were gone there was an immense sense of relief in the pleasant house, and the rain seemed somehow less of a calamity, and more of a reminder of the blessing of fires and snug rooms. Mollie, stout

and uncomfortable in her new clothes, unbent somewhat, and became cheerful in the soothing company of Kate's three babies; Peter, with Tom and John, went downtown; normal life recommenced.

At eleven Kate went to market, and drove her aunts to the Turk Street cottage, where Mrs Walsh, confined by a cold, was anxiously awaiting the details of the wedding.

And then for an hour, for two hours, they sat in the little kitchen gossiping, reviewing every minute circumstance idly, sometimes laughing until the tears came into their eyes, and Kate laid her bright head upon the scarred and discolored table, where it had so often lain in laughter and tears so many years ago, and sometimes gravely and dubiously, as they analyzed the strange apathy and coldness of the bride.

"I said to her at breakfast, 'Weren't the flowers in church lovely?' " Kate remembered. "It was all pink and blue stock, Grandma, and pink roses with blue delphiniums—you never saw anything look so sweet! And she looked down, you know that mournful way she has, and sighed and said, 'I had palms for Papa. But the nuns had it all decorated for Easter when Mama died, and they left it—it was all lilies and ferns!' "

"She was like Willie Mulvany, that drove O'Connor's hearses for year'rs," old Mrs Walsh said with relish, after the laugh. "Well, he married a ger'rl from Oakland,—this was forty years agone,—whose sister was a Presentation nun, but I disremember the name; it was a name you wouldn't often be hearin' the sound of—was it Macmullen, now?" she mused. "Well, annyways, they was married at Saint Dominic's, and Willie had a horse and buggy ready to drive the ger'rl down to his aunt's in San Mateo, where they was goin' to stay a week. And didn't he go finely along the roads, talkin' o' this and that, an' the ould nag'd turn in at the cimitaries, and stop short at the tombs, and the poor young wife give a screech of laughter, and yelled at him, 'Willie! Where's this you brought me?' However," Mrs Walsh ended, inconsequently, "they was very happy, and they had thim twins that won a prize for handwritin' in the Fair."

"For heaven's sakes!" Maggie murmured. "Kate, goin' to have tea?"

"Oh, I ought to go back to my children," Kate said, with a long yawn, laying her head on her folded arms on the table. "I thought I'd run them all out to the museum this afternoon, and let them wear their little legs out——"

"They're much bêtter off in their own nursery," Mollie suggested.

"I know it. But they get perfectly frenzied, a day like this," said Kate. "The last time it rained I bundled them all up, and took them down on the beach—the ocean was perfectly wild, and the kids adored it. They got soaked to the skin, came home and had baths, and were perfectly fine afterward."

"Well, that beats Banager!" Mrs Walsh, scandalized, commented mildly. "Did Ellen look good at the weddin'?" she asked. Not that this point had not been thoroughly discussed, but in review.

"Stunning," Kate answered. "She was late, of course, and she rushed away from breakfast. But I imagine——"

She paused significantly, on the last word.

"Yes, I do, too!" Maggie agreed, quickly. "How old is the little girl—Patricia or whatever she calls her?"

"January——" Kate mused. "She's a year and a half old. Well, that's all right," she added, thoughtfully.

"She never comes in here," her grandmother said, resentfully. "Month in and month out, I never see that one! They was tellin' me her little ger'rl is very cunnin', with the cute little ways she has on her, but I'd never be one to swear to it!"

Maggie and Allie glanced briefly at Mollie, glanced at each other. And Mollie sighed heavily.

"She never comes near her papa and me," she said, sadly.

"She's terribly busy, Aunt Mollie," Kate defended her cousin, "and Rob hates to have her away from the house when he's there. You know what a doctor's hours are!"

"I suppose so," Mollie said, meekly, shrugging. "But never the day came when I was too busy to run in and see my mother!" she added. "Well, you bear them, and raise them, and then off they walk on you," Mollie said. "Ellen gone, Martin gone, Cecy gone—thank God, Tom's left to be a comfort to us in our old age. But he'll go next!"

Kate, who had been up with a croupy baby in the night, felt sleepy and pleasantly weary, in the warm and quiet kitchen. She sipped her delicious hot tea thoughtfully, wondering whether to go downtown, now that she was this far upon her way, and get through some of the interminable shopping, or to go straight home. Mollie thought resentfully of her new daughter-in-law, "with about as much blood in her as a soup-bone," Peter had said, capturing a fine fellow like Mart! Maggie and Allie dreamed their vague, distorted maiden dreams of sewing, of maybe getting to church for a few of the Mission sermons, of meals, of other people's cancers and babies and quarrels.

"Never mind, Mart'll wake her up," said the old woman, suddenly, "and by Christmas time she'll be lookin' up saints' names for the mont' of July. Leave her have a couple of young children, and she'll forget whether they was pink lilies or tar-weed at her mama's funeral!"

And the session broke up in a gale of laughter.

But Kate had a special, tender affection for Mart, to whom she had always felt the family was a little unfair, and she carried from his wedding a haunting impression of something pathetically young, helpless, and unhappy, in his eyes.

The more brilliant Tom had always eclipsed Mart in his parents' estimation, Kate knew, and indeed he was neither so magnetic nor so clever as Tom. But he was so simple, so sturdily good and steady, he had been such a miracle of tender understanding with Paul, that Kate thought

him one man in a million, where real worth was concerned, and John confirmed her, as far as his association with Mart in the business went.

And to have Uncle Peter so glum, Aunt Mollie so inexplicably critical, Ellen indifferent, Cecy gone, and Tom merely amusedly casual about Martin's marriage; more, to have the bride herself so unresponsive and dull, cut Kate to the heart. She herself had taken the affair in charge, had attempted, with all the force of her personality, to infuse a little life and gaiety into it.

In vain. And even when the young Cunninghams returned from their rainy, cold wedding trip, and were established in the Sacramento Street flat, Kate saw no particular reason for hoping better things.

Martin was quiet, cheerful, uncomplaining; Lizzie was just the same as before, tearful, patient, compliant, resigned. Anything less like a marriage, Kate reflected fearfully, could hardly be imagined.

Lizzie's Sacramento Street apartment was newly, completely furnished, everything was good and uninteresting. So many chairs, so many rockers, gas stove, Victrola. A table, a rug, a hat-rack in the hall. A framed picture of the Coliseum over the mantel, an oratory in the alcove of Lizzie's room, with a lighted wick in a red glass tumbler floating before a religious picture.

Lizzie's room; Mart's room. A flat, clean white bed in each. Kate elevated her eyebrows when Lizzie showed her the place, and when Lizzie by chance was called to the telephone Kate stooped quickly and investigated the tops of both beds. Both made up.

But she made no comment. There would be a baby some day, and then everything would straighten itself out. And if Martin found his wife, as he must find her, disappointing, at least Martin would be the most ecstatic, the most adoring father who ever held a child in his arms!

Occasionally Mart and his wife, by invitation, dined with Peter and Mollie. Once, in the fall after they were married, Lizzie gave her husband's parents a careful, lifeless dinner. Afterward she and Mollie sat silent about the gas-log with the woolly gray asbestos lichen fluffing gently upon it in the flame, while Mart and his father talked business and store personalities.

Kate invited them to visit her at the Lake, but they did not come. And when she and her troop returned to the city, she told John that there was just one place drearier to visit than Lizzie's house, and that was poor Aunt Mollie's house in Howard Street.

In the mansion where children's feet had echoed, and children's laughter, quarrels, studies, illnesses had made the months and years fly, silence reigned now. Mollie would come in from shopping or church, find Allie quietly sewing in one of the big, handsome upstairs rooms, loosen bonnet strings and sit down to get her breath.

"How is he?" Mollie would jerk her head slightly in the direction of Tom's room.

"He seems fine. I think he'll be fine tomorrow. McCarthy said he wouldn't come back unless we 'phomed."

"Hear from Kate?"

"Yes, she 'phomed, and she'd just been talking to Ellen, and sure enough, there's goin' to be another in January!"

"You'd think she'd come in, and tell her own mother about it."

"Well, you would think so. But she's queer."

Silence. And the hum—hum—hum of Allie's machine. The snap of a thread and whir of the wheel. Then silence again.

"Would you French it, Mollie?"

"It makes it stronger."

Silence. Then a maid at the door.

"Will Mr Tom have any lunch, Miss Cunningham?"

"Wait a minute, Mary. I'll run up and ask him will he."

"Ellen, dear, you don't mean to be," Kate said, "but you're terribly cruel to Aunt Mollie and Uncle Pete!"

"Where do you get this 'cruel' stuff?" Ellen demanded, good-naturedly. "I think it's the limit the way Mama acts to *me*. Here I am with two babies, busy as I can be—my husband an important man, working up in his profession——"

"But, darling, just to run in now and then? That wouldn't cost you so much?"

"Well, it would, in a way, Kate," Ellen reasoned, undisturbed. "You haven't any idea the way Mama acts when I do go. She sighs, and asks me where I've been and what I've been doing—she didn't think we should have another baby so soon, and when she came to the hospital—and she only came once!—she got the nurse into a perfect tantrum, and she talked so to Rob about my being young, and having a good rest, that he'll *never* forgive her!

"And then, another thing," Ellen added, as Kate, looking troubled, was silent. "The only times Papa is home are Sundays, when Rob always likes to go down to the country, and play golf and bridge, and I can't ask him to stay in town then! Or else Papa's home late in the afternoon, when the children are going to bed, and I'm supposed to be resting for dinner! I would go," Ellen finished, with a trace of her old sulkiness, "if Mama wouldn't *always* tell me how long it is since she saw me. 'It was the fifth of January,' she'll say. And if I speak of the children, she'll say, 'I don't see anything of them,' and sigh, and if I talk of Mart she always sighs, and says how quiet he's grown!"

"I know!" Kate said, with a desperate little laugh. "But at the same time, Ellen, she's your mother, and it seems to me it's your duty to go in, every week at least, and cheer her up a little, and bear with her if she's cross. *I* do," Kate added, seriously; "and last night I took the boys at about five. Uncle Peter was sitting in the downstairs room, in the dusk, and he called out, 'Is it you, Elleneen?'

"I know he loves me," Kate went on, glad to see, by Ellen's suddenly sobered face, that she was making an impression, "but when I went in he was really disappointed."

"I know," Ellen said, slowly, in a low voice. "I know, Kate. I really will, I'll make a point of it. But Rob," she added, regaining confidence with the mere mention of his name, "Rob has no patience with that *family* stuff!" Ellen said. "He says that just because people *happen* to have children——"

"Honor thy father and thy mother," Kate reminded her.

"My dear," Ellen returned, unruffled, "I do! Kate," she added, exhibiting the baby's hand, "look at the little white rolls of skin she has in her hands—she always has them! You know they might as well have a garbage man as a doctor for a father. Rob never pays the slightest attention to what I tell him about them! I think the child has leprosy!"

Kate, instantly diverted, took little Virginia Costello, two months old, into her experienced arms, inspected the tiny mottled palm.

"Ellen, you idiot! That's just fluff from the blankets! They all do that. Look how it rolls off," she said.

"Virginia, do you want me to give you another licking?" Ellen demanded, of her youngest born. "How dare you lie to your mother?"

And as she laid her young face, radiant with love, close to the little pulpy, unresponsive one, Kate forgave her everything. Each generation of mothers to its own responsibilities, thought Kate, and only silence and neglect, and the pitifully hoarded crumbs of life for the passing generation!

A few months later she asked the Martin Cunninghams to the Lake and this time Lizzie wrote that they would be glad to come. But on the appointed day it was only she who appeared at the little mountain station. Martin, she explained, would come up with John for the week-end.

Two or three days of Lizzie, silently puttering about after her, drove Kate almost to despair. Lizzie made herself useful, and was sweet, if silent and timid, with the children. Her bony, cool hands were always ready to help Kate with bed-making, with raking, with little meals, or little bathing-suits.

But she was so dreary! It was Mama again, and the terrible night when Lizzie had not summoned the doctor; it was Papa's cancer; it was Mary Dufficy laid out with her infant, in her shroud, and the Gerry girls keening over their father's grave.

On Friday, when the men were expected, Kate suggested that Lizzie move her belongings up to the little log cabin that was one of the guest-rooms, where Martin would sleep that night. Hitherto her guest had occupied a little room off the pine-walled sitting room, as less alarming for a lone woman in the silent mountain nights.

Quietly, stubbornly, smilingly, Lizzie said that she would remain where she was.

"It's less work," she said, mildly, busily continuing the pea-shelling

that happened to engage her and Kate at the moment. But Kate noted that she did not meet her eye, and that her ear, under a lifeless loop of shiny brown hair, turned red.

"But, Lizzie, won't Martin think that rather odd?" Kate asked, after a pause.

"Oh, he won't mind!" his wife said, confidently. "He likes to read at night," she added, lamely.

Kate pondered. The moment was with her all through the happy, soft summer day, as she flitted about with fresh sheets and new cakes of soap, frowned over tiny splinters, and greased sunburned little faces. In the afternoon she said suddenly to her guest:

"Lizzie. Tell me something!"

Lizzie instantly turned scarlet, as with prescience, but she smiled gallantly.

"Are you," said Kate, her hands upon the other's shoulders, her beautiful face full of a sort of maternal concern, "are you Mart Cunningham's wife?"

"I don't know what you mean," Lizzie said, faintly, trying to appear offended.

"You know very well what I mean!" Kate answered, sternly.

For a second Mart's wife assumed an almost jaunty air of surprise and protest. Then suddenly she crumbled visibly, trembled, and put her hands over her face.

"Don't talk to me about it, Kate!" she said, with dignity.

"Don't *talk* to you about it!" Kate echoed, roundly. "That's just exactly what I *will* do! Lizzie, have you and Mart quarreled?"

"We've never," Lizzie said, gulping, "had a word."

"Don't you *love* him, Lizzie?" Kate asked, one arm about her, her face bent close to the other's averted face.

"I think he's the finest man God ever made!" said Lizzie, thickly, with a gulp.

"But then do you mean to tell me——! But then——! But *why*——?" Kate demanded, completely bewildered.

"I don't think we should discuss it," Lizzie said, in a cold, reserved voice. She straightened herself, shook off Kate's hand, and turned away proudly. "It's a matter between Martin and me, and he understands perfectly," she said.

"It's a matter of a vow before God," Kate corrected her, sharply.

"Not," Lizzie defended herself, quickly, "not if a person has already taken another vow."

Kate regarded her steadily.

"Do you mean that *you* took a vow?" she asked, slowly, and their eyes met.

Lizzie stared at her face defiantly; her cheeks were very red. Not a muscle of her face moved.

"And then you got married?" demanded Kate.

"I didn't know anything about it," Lizzie offered, with the grudging air of one whose sacred privacy is being invaded.

"Yes, but you knew—you certainly knew that marriage—you knew that marriage wasn't—*that!*" Kate fumbled, with all the instinctive avoidance of her Celtic blood for the actual words.

"I tell you I didn't know anything, and it's my affair and Martin's anyway, Kate!" Lizzie said, goaded into anger. "Mama was never one to talk to me about marriage and babies and all that," she continued, in a slightly more conciliatory and faintly apologetic tone. "And there was no one else I could talk to. For all I knew, babies came——" She paused. "For all I knew, men——" she began again and paused again.

Kate knew that the indication of utter and virgin ignorance was true. Lizzie had probably known as much of marriage, upon her wedding day, as upon the day of her birth. Such subjects were utterly unknown, in the clean, pious, gentle circle of her early years. The aged mother would have been morally, mentally, yes, and even physically unable to mention them to her daughter. Books touching upon them, conversation through which they might become familiar, were abhorrent to purity like this.

Lizzie had taught primary grades all her life. But there was nothing in that well-thumbed little curriculum of greatest common divisor and Spencerian loops to open her eyes. She had very probably come to Mart, Kate reflected, believing vaguely that the laws of calm logic and dispassionate decision would regulate her married as her single life.

"Lizzie, did Mart know this?"

"Oh, yes, I told him, the day of Mama's funeral, when he wanted me to marry him right off," Lizzie answered. And Kate detected a pathetic note of relief in her voice, as if she were glad to be speaking, even of the unspeakable, at last. "I told him I'd taken a vow, when I was confirmed," she pursued, "that married or single, I'd preserve—I'd do what I told you——"

"How old were you when you were confirmed?"

"I was twelve."

"Yes, and how much did you know about life?"

"Well, nothing, I suppose," Lizzie conceded. "But I read about plenty of the Saints that did that."

"You mean married, and then lived a single life?"

"Well, yes," said Lizzie and fell into a mild silence, a silence with something almost triumphant in it, as if she had proved her point. "My own saint did that," she added, contentedly.

"Yes, but after she'd had four children!"

"Well, that wouldn't make any difference," Lizzie said, with a look of surprise.

"But, Lizzie, what about your marriage vow? The vow of an ignorant little girl of twelve amounts to nothing, you weren't even legally of age then! But the vow of a woman, who solemnly swears——"

"But Martin understood the whole of it, and agreed, beside my moth-

er's coffin, that he'd let me have the say of it!" the other woman argued, readily.

"A lot *he* knew about it!" Kate muttered, confirmed by this remark in an old belief that Martin's youth had been as strangely innocent and protected as that of his wife, and convinced that his utter ignorance of the ways of woman was at least partly accountable for the whole state of affairs.

There was a look of serene and stubborn fanaticism in Lizzie's eye; Kate knew that look. It was the look of Cecy, of a hundred girls, smilingly putting aside the claims of home and kindred to follow their own religious lights; it was the look of the invalid, fasting through the forty days of Lent, although her nerves and her increased infirmities cause a whole household suffering and inconvenience.

No logic would deal with Lizzie. An exalted passion for martyrdom possessed her. Her eyes shone with satisfaction.

"Lizzie, was this vow, as you call it, for life?"

"It was." Lizzie recalled herself to earth, frowned, sighed. "It was until a sign came from God," she said, simply. "Mart sees it as I do," she resumed, "and over and over again he'll tell me that I must do what I feel to be right! God only knows what a saint he is," Lizzie added, passionately, "and I hope God'll make up to him for all his goodness to me! There's never a harsh word out of him," she went on, eager to praise him, now that Kate could understand, "and there's hardly a time I go out to my graves that he doesn't tell me to take some flowers along, and be sure to get a taxi."

"And I hope God'll make it up to him by having Lizzie Daley fall down a sewer opening!" Kate said, disgustedly, to her husband, when the Cunningham visit was over and they were discussing the pair. "And sending him a wife with some sense! Wouldn't you know it'd be Lizzie, scared to say her shadow belongs to her, and older than he is, and not pretty, and without a cent, who would set up that kind of nonsense! And she's proud of it, John. It's a sacred vow, and the more miserably unsettled and unhappy it makes them both feel, the more proof she thinks it is of being right! You could talk yourself blue in the face, and she'd go right on smiling serenely."

"She's waiting for a sign from God?" John mused. "What do you suppose she'd regard as a sign from God?"

Kate stared at him steadily a long time. A strange little smile began to twitch at the corners of her beautiful mouth.

"Well, now, you interest me strangely, Mr Kelly!" she said, after a pause. "I wonder!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE CONVENT GARDEN WAS OLD, and its trees had reached a mighty beauty that made everything in their neighborhood picturesque. Walking under them, the white-robed figures of girls looked fairylike, and through their immense branches the summer sunlight that filtered into the garden had a concentrated goldness.

Beneath them lay the neat angles of the tennis-courts, the gymnasium's low roof, the blazing bars of border flowers, and the trim paths. No fallen leaves here, no disorder, no neglect. Watering sprays flung arcs of diamonds over the lawns; the fountains splashed deliciously in the hot silence of the long holidays. Sometimes, from the dense shadow of the heavy great leaves, a fig dropped to the ground, birds flashed warily and silently about the brimming marble pool that was provided especially for them.

The beautiful new gymnasium was far down past the grape-arbors, and almost buried by foliage from sight of the long convent building. Above its main doorway deeply cut in the Spanish pink plaster, under the dull pink Spanish tiles of the roof, were the words: "In loving memory of Paul Francis Cunningham," and the two dates that were so pitifully close. And beneath was the phrase: "The dove, finding no place to rest its foot, returned to Him in the ark."

And before the building, and up and down under the fig and pepper and the lofty, shabby eucalyptus trees, walked Cecy and Sister Superior.

It was a gala time at the convent, perhaps the most important in its proud history of fifty busy years. From far-away France, small and wrinkled and heavily spectacled, had come the little elderly Mother General, visiting all the houses in Australia and America and Canada on a long, triumphant tour, and met everywhere with arches, and songs, and laughter and tears of joy. And it was to be Cecy's tremendous honor, with the other young "White Veils" who had, with her, borne their novitiate bravely, to receive her habit, and make her final vows, in the presence of this august visitor.

The convent had been decorated from top to bottom, songs had been composed, cantatas had been sung. The "children," as the scholars were affectionately called, had been rallied, even in vacation; the "old children," who were the alumnae, had gathered, with their own children and grandchildren, to welcome Mother General. Yesterday there had been a "Jubilee," ropes of starry Shasta daisies, masses of wilting sweet blooms everywhere, incense and the strains of organ music in the chapel, nuns and fashionably dressed women of the world, laughing with the ecstasy of children together over the lavish "refection" in the garden.

Today Mother General was visiting the Stockton convent, and tomorrow would come the solemn ceremony at which twenty-seven girls, trained and disciplined by the slow hours of three endless years of prayer

and sacrifice of self, would dedicate themselves for ever to poverty, chastity, and obedience, and the education of Christian youth.

Tonight, some time between supper and chapel, Cecy must go to the Mistress of Novices, in her little office, and kneel, and to the elderly woman's kindly "What do you wish, my child?" must answer, "The habit of our holy order, Sister."

Some of the novices feared this as an ordeal, but not Cecy. She was humbly, gratefully eager for the moment. There had been storms in these long years, but they were over now. Her heart, her soul, had found harbor. She was deeply, miraculously content.

When Cecy had written to her mother, in the early days of her novitiate, that "she had found a mother and sisters to replace those she had lost," it had been at the suggestion of the Mistress of Novices. That was the form letter; and Cecy's duty, in those days, had been blindly to obey. It had not been quite true.

But it was true now. Among these women who had sought, like herself, the cloistered life, it was natural that she should discover a thousand affinities. She loved them all. There were no quarrels in the convent, the rule of silence saw to that, and there was, at the daily recreation period, all the laughter, and the innocent joking of happy children.

The narrowness of the convent life was that of the camp, or of the castle, the community whose nearness and completeness eclipses all the bigness of the world. As to hospital undergraduate nurses the little rumor of a change of wards is more important than the sacking of a distant city, or as young lieutenants gather to discuss the possible holding, dispatching, or disbanding of battalions, and hear unmoved of politics and powers, so the nuns lived upon the tiny events of the day, and their hearts and souls were filled to the brim with the peaceful minutiæ of convent routine.

But it was minutiæ glorified and uplifted by the constant presence of the spirit, the whole-hearted humble idea upon the part of every one of forty good women to be better, to be kinder, more charitable, more forbearing. Their simple robes, that gave no avenue for vanity or competition, the exquisite physical beauty and plainness of their environment, their deep interest in the constantly changing current of the girls who went through their hands—the difficult girls, the good girls, the musical girls, the girls who would come among themselves as "White Veils" some day—satisfied them wholly.

Not every woman who wore the habit was happy, but many of them were, with the happiness that is not of this world, the happiness of the detached spirit, the woman who lives, and yet is sweetly and mysteriously dead, who drinks deep at the fountain of all lives, because she has lost her own.

All Cecy Cunningham's natural merriment, clouded by sulkiness or sensitiveness at home, had developed here. She had learned to laugh with enchanting gaiety at the simple greediness of a fellow-novice, at the blun-

ders good Sister Philomene made in English. She had learned patience, when across her newly oiled refectory floor dear old Sister Simon had innocently trailed a dripping pail of water. She had learned to turn obediently away from the fascinating work of replacing books on the dim, big library shelves, without explanation, without apparent necessity, and devote herself to some less sympathetic task.

She would be Sister Mary Nicholas, if—and Cecy's heart hammered furiously with fear at the "if"—if she received the veil tomorrow. Some of her associates had already had intimations of acceptance, and hints as to future employment. Bess Creary would be Sister Genevieve, and there were indications that she would be given the linen room, in dear dead Sister Juliana's place; Mary Muller would be Sister Bonaventura, and would certainly have a primary class to teach—she was a born teacher.

But Cecy had had no inkling of her own fate, and it made her a little more nervous as to her status as a novice, a little less self-conscious about asking for the black veil. Once robed, she would have no further fear! Duly given a trial, Cecy had not proved to be a particularly successful teacher; she grew too fond of the girls, and they on their side got "crushes" on her. Perhaps they would ask her to help Sister Adalbert with the music lessons; that would be pleasant, in the glass-walled cubicles that rang with scales all morning long.

Anything would be pleasant! Just not to be refused, just not to be kept out, when all the others were taken in!

The Superior had seized upon this day, a lull in between two full and thrilling days, to have a few minutes' chat with each one of the twenty-seven aspirants. Now it was Cecy's turn.

"Your mother will be here for the profession tomorrow?"

"Yes, Mother." It was part of Cecy's training never to say more than was required.

Silence. The nun's hands were slipped up to her elbows in the big, loose black sleeves, Cecy's were gripping her own nervously, in the loose white. Their rosaries rattled as they walked.

"Do you anticipate that she will regret your profession, if it should be accepted?"

"Yes," Cecy admitted, reluctantly. "My mother resents my being here, since my little sister has left home, and my brother."

"She has—two—at home?"

"One. My brother Tom. He hasn't been very strong since he lived down in Borneo."

"You wrote your mother that you felt it right to remain here?"

"Oh, yes, a full year ago."

"What does your father say?"

"My father!" Cecy's voice thickened only a shade, steadied. "My father's an old angel!" she said, impulsively.

"They came to see you on Sunday. Did they speak of it?" asked the sweet, dispassionate voice.

"Oh, yes, Mother, my mother always does! She thinks I ought to go home."

"I told you at Christmas-time," said the nun, "that I would not advise you. But let me remind you, Cecilia, that this is your last opportunity, barring truly exceptional circumstances, to leave us. I have been praying especially for you; we all have. But the final decision must be yours!"

"I have made it," Cecy said, quietly.

"You think your duty is not at home?" the nun said, thoughtfully.

"I know it is not. Mother——" the girl added, eagerly, and paused. Her face, flushed in its prim white bands, was radiant, and her eyes suffused. "When you say that, I hope that I am to be accepted!" Cecy faltered.

The nun looked at her dispassionately, a flicker of something like humor in her shrewd gray eye.

"And that would make you so happy?" she asked.

"Oh, *Mother!*" The rich shade, the blazing pools of light glowing in the old garden, danced into stars and arrows before Cecy's wet eyes.

"Yes, and suppose then I have to scold you again for arguing with poor Sister Thomasine, about—what was it, African lions?" asked the older nun. "You, who are one of my oldest girls, and who know well that Sister Thomasine has not had advantages," she continued, keenly.

"I know," Cecy said, hurriedly and penitently. "I—I told her how sorry I was—that I was wrong——"

"Yes, but that's not perfection, Cecilia," answered the other, sharply. "That's not perfection! To hurt her feelings, and then glibly run to her, and say 'I'm sorry!'"

"I know it," Cecy said, very low.

"Well," said the nun, briskly, "and if you cannot teach, and have no special business ability, what are we going to do with you?"

"I don't know," Cecy answered, smiling.

"You helped Sister Rose in the sewing room last week. How did you like that?"

"Oh, very much, Mother!"

"Very good," said the nun. "Here come our dear visitors back, I just saw the automobiles," she added in a dismissing voice. "Run up to the chapel and say a little prayer, and be sure you find time to see dear Sister Aloysius before supper!"

"Ah, Mother——!" Cecy said, in ecstasy, knowing herself accepted. She fell upon her knees, and caught the two kind, hard hands to her lips. And the nun felt her fingers wet, as the White Veil fled away, dutifully obliterating herself in the path of her important elders.

The Superior joined the visiting Frenchwoman, and the two or three Superiors who accompanied her, and they walked slowly up and down

the paths together, in the evening peace. The convent bells rang the Angelus, and the notes crisscrossed lazily in the soft golden air.

They interrupted their business conference about tomorrow to say the little prayer. Then the local Superior said:

"You remember, Mother General, when we all wrote you our different intentions, to the Mother House in Paris, that our intention here was that God would send us a good, strong, sweet Mistress of Novices, when Sister Aloysius goes to St Louis in two or three years?"

"I do not remember!" said the Mother General, with a sympathetic smile glinting through her strong glasses.

"I think she has been sent to us, so we must put that as another answered prayer," said the Superior. "I was just talking to her! One of our own girls. Sister Aloysius has been watching her for a year, with this in view, and she is delighted with her. She is strong, intelligent, ardent—the perfect type."

"And her influence on the others?" asked the nun, keenly.

"Is remarkable. She has no idea of it," pursued the Superior, "I have been talking of putting her in the sewing room or the laundry."

"And she expects that?"

"She expects to obey."

"Ah," said the old nun, with a deep breath of satisfaction, "what a miracle it is—what a miracle it is! The spirit—it never fails and it never changes."

"This girl has had strong trials," the other said. "She was a beloved daughter, badly spoiled by home training. And the family even now are making it very hard for her!"

"Ah, these families!" laughed the Mother General. "What a cross they are, and how alike they are! In England, in France, in America, always the same! 'My mother doesn't want me to become a nun!' "

"My own mother told me she would never speak to me again," said the Superior, smiling.

"And mine!" added the Mother General. "Well, point me out your little Mistress of Novices tonight. It is the most important of offices. I should like to have a chance to study her. And then, after the profession tomorrow, send her to me!"

And ten minutes later, although Cecy did not know it, she had been selected for the greatest honor that could be bestowed upon her.

Cecy was kneeling in the chapel, rapt with ecstasy, utterly and wholly at peace. She was not conscious of the keen eyes of the old nun kneeling in a stall behind her, studying her. She felt as if she were floating in ethereal sweetness and light.

Tomorrow night the long strain would be over; the clergy would be gone, the streaming visitors; Mama, tearful and plaintive, Kate so absorbed in those singularly commonplace children; Ellen in her fashionable white frock and Paris hat. Silence, peace, would once again enwrap the beloved convent, the arcades and grape-arbors, the wide clean paths,

the dreaming trees and oiled corridors, the airy, bare rooms so exquisitely ordered, the polished, candle-lighted glory of the chapel, in whose windows lingered the last golden summer light. And sister Mary of St Nicholas would have her holy habit!

Cecy went swiftly, smilingly through the wide halls, her white veil flying back from her happy face, with its sturdy, childishly rounded cheeks and its peppering of golden freckles.

Sister Aloysius was alone, and she would not let Cecy kneel.

"No, sit here, my child. I was thinking of you. You have come to ask for the black veil?"

"Please, Sister."

"And this is your last night of the white one?"

"Deo volente," said Cecy.

"Deo volente! And have I been very harsh with you, my child?"

"Oh, Sister, no!" said Cecy, her heart bursting.

"You are very dear to me," said the older nun. "Do you remember that I said, after a Lent retreat many years ago, at Saint Elizabeth's, that you would come to us some day?"

"I always wanted to!" Cecy said, smiling. And she believed it. The memory of Dion Taylor had faded into the far-ago, unreal background of her life, with the measles and her broken arm, and her little sister Daisy. Within her heart was deep, unclouded joy.

A bell rang. Feet chipped in the corridors. Black veils, white veils, went to and fro.

"Supper," said the Mistress of Novices, rising. "Well, do you agree with me now?"

"The Kingdom of Heaven come to earth!" said Cecy, walking staidly at her side.

CHAPTER XXIX

"How I have kept my hands off that girl Lizzie all winter I don't know!" said Kate.

"Now, Kate," John warned her. "You keep out of it. You've been in delicate health this winter, and you have a delicate baby—that's enough for you, without butting into Martin's affairs!"

"I want to tell you right now, John Kelly, they'll separate!" predicted Kate, looking with such infinite love into the pale little face in the crook of her arm that it was possibly not all her imagination that the tiny Catherine smiled at her. "John, could a child ten weeks old smile?" she asked, diverted.

"You know more about it than I," John answered, flinging down his newspaper, and stretching in his big chair. The May night, in the high mountains, was chilly, but the cabin was deliciously warm.

There had been whooping-cough in Kate's nursery all winter, and con-

cern for the life of more than one of her three, with the colds and croup that had followed. And at Easter the new baby had come, a delicate baby, coughing almost before she cried. Schooling had been irregular, and Kate's own condition, worn with worry and strain, unsatisfactory, and so John had moved them all up into the healthful piny woods, where the children were to run wild for a whole glorious half-year.

A roaring fire had been burning in the simple little sitting room all evening; it had died to pink ashes now, and the room was comfortably warm. The lamplight was golden upon Kate and her baby; the older children, with wild witch-dances in pajamas, had been herded an hour or two ago into an adjoining room.

"Your bedroom's like an oven!" said John, after an interval of tending fires. "I hate to leave you tomorrow. Does he keep you in wood?"

"Keep me in wood—here, carry her in, she's gone off!" Kate answered, handing up the baby. "He buries me in wood! Tarantulas and ants stream all over the place, from the old logs that Chinese heathen drags in. And, my dear, it'll be spring in two weeks. We've wonderful trillium and iris now, and the currant's all out! I love it. Especially," added Kate, having darkened and made safe from fire the sitting room with the desperate swiftness of the sleepy, and now in her own room, and undressing rapidly, "especially as the baby really is gaining. Now, three ounces in a week—it's nothing, of course, to what the others did, but it shows that she's started! No, but really," said Kate, returning to her original subject, "really I am going to interfere between Mart and Lizzie, and I want you to help me!"

"That I'll never do; it's too dangerous, interfering between man and wife," John asserted, firmly, leaping into bed, pulling the covers up about his head, and eyeing his wife with shuddering satisfaction. "Br-r-rr! the sheets are like shrouds!" he said.

"Aren't they terrible?" Kate asked, yawning as she opened the casement window. "Oh, what a divine night! What a *night!* Really, it's worth your while to get up to see the moonlight on the redwoods. Like black lace! The whole thing looks like a park. I'll tell you the part I want *you* to play, later," she went on, serenely reverting to Mart. "It will honestly come under the head of charity, John, for they're both getting *queer,* actually queer. It was all very well last summer, it seemed to me a sort of joke. Lots of girls make those silly vows before they know what they're talking about, and then get sort of obsessed by them. John, the moonlight actually looks like snow on the roof of the old barn!"

"I don't care if it looks like corn-beef hash," John answered, simply, as the cold, aromatic night air, heavy with rain on leaves, fresh grass, and the scent of wood-violets, came rushing in. Kate laughed, flying about bare-footed from one room to the other, leaping into bed only to leap out again, with a last inspiration regarding the boys' blankets or the draught straight on Rosemary's head.

When she finally crawled shivering in beside him, John was sound

asleep. But he stretched a big arm out toward her without waking, and Kate, feeling the blessed warmth and relaxation penetrate to her very bones, went contentedly off to sleep with her mind full of plans for Lizzie and Mart, and her head where she loved to rest it, against his shoulder.

Lizzie came up in June; in her quiet, apathetic way, she apparently liked to be with Kate and the children. She was more reserved, more coldly self-contained than ever, and Kate felt some little misgiving as to her own plans.

But she broached the subject courageously enough on a glowing, silent Friday morning, when the early fogs had drifted high into the blue sky, when the Lake sparkled and shone in the sunlight, and under the great redwoods all sorts of homely camp noises: hammers, the splitting of wood, shouting of children, slamming of doors, echoed wholesomely through the sweet, piny air.

Lingering at the breakfast table, where they could watch the blue play garments of the three older children, the two women talked seriously for more than an hour, and Lizzie wept. Kate, who had her baby on her arm, did not spare her guest.

"I don't think you should talk to Martin about it!" Lizzie, wiping her eyes with the back of her wrist, and sniffing, protested in a hurt tone.

"I didn't. Good heavens! How can you think I would talk to Martin about it! All I have to do is *see* you both," Kate answered, promptly. "You nervous and quiet, Martin twenty years older than he was when you were married two years ago, both of you like a couple of old, old people! All I have to do," Kate added, significantly, "is see Mart go up to that little guest-cabin of mine at night, and you turn in here, in the spare room! That isn't married life, Lizzie."

"I don't care whether it's married life or not!" Lizzie burst forth, desperately, after a silence. "Mart's working too hard at the office, and that's all the matter with him. It's our own affair."

Kate studied her thoughtfully. Lizzie had not grown handsomer in her thirtieth year; she was a lean, anxious-looking woman whose skin was already threaded with fine lines of worry and frowning. She had developed a spiritual super-sensitiveness, she was proudly and darkly stubborn in her unhappy stupidity.

About Mart's exquisitely clean, unattractive house she slaved like a humble bondwoman, dusting the ugly furniture, cooking the uninteresting meals. She would not have a servant, the lowlier her services for her titular husband, the better satisfied some strange, morbid instinct in Lizzie's virgin heart. She went to church, went to market, looked apathetically at the newspaper headlines, wept, brooded. At Communion Lizzie usually cried uncontrolledly, returning home to make her own coffee with a red-tipped nose and reddened eyes.

"Lizzie," Kate said, presently, watching her this morning, in her

awkward resentment and ready tears, "you told me once that you would keep this—this thing you call a vow of yours, until you had a sign from God, didn't you?—— Frank *Kelly,*" Kate interrupted herself to call sternly to her older son, "you put that straight back into the waste-basket! If I've told you once I've told you five thousand times that I *will* not not have you children gathering rubbish out of the waste-baskets! Take it away from him, Sarah. Give it to Sarah, darling. Now look at your hands—all nasty ink! Go straight in—what the fascination of waste-baskets is, I really don't know," Kate added, mildly. "Well, Lizzie, to go back——"

"I wish to goodness, Kate, you'd not worry about me," Lizzie muttered. "There's nothing the matter."

"But, Lizzie dear, you can't go on as you are for twenty years, thirty years! You never see any one, you don't even go to see Mart's father and mother any more, you two have no life at all. And I tell you frankly, he'll meet some woman who *does* love him some day——"

"There's no one could love him better than I do!" Lizzie, forlorn and desperate, twisting her veiny hands, burst out.

"Well, he'll *leave* you!" Kate predicted.

"Then the sin will be on his soul, and not mine," Lizzie said, after a moment, in a desolate voice.

"I wouldn't be so sure! Anyway," Kate said, "this is what I want you to do. I want you to make a novena with me—nine days, that'll come out next Saturday," Kate added, with a frowning air of concentration. "Next Saturday! You and I will make a novena every night, and see if no sign is sent before then!"

"A sign," mused Lizzie, in a reluctant voice, "that I'm to break my vow!"

"Exactly, only it wasn't a vow," answered Kate.

They chanced to be alone with the children and Kate's old grandmother at the time, and Lizzie, perhaps untrammeled spiritually in the absence of the men, shyly told her hostess, two days later, that even so much prayer had seemed to help her strangely.

"And had you thought that Saturday, the day the novena's up, is the very day Mart gets here?" demanded Lizzie, a sad sort of awe in her eyes.

"For pity's sake!" Kate said, with an air of astonishment. All week long she encouraged in Lizzie a sense of mournful importance, writing John meanwhile that if ever there was a good nun spoiled, it was in Lizzie Daley Cuningham. "Nothing matters to her except a stupid sense of stubbornness, where a kind of half-baked piety is concerned. I doubt if she's worth the fuss!" Kate wrote, burdened and harassed as only the hostess may be by a heavy and dependent guest. "She ought to be under a sensible Superior, who would make her get off her foot!" And she signed the letter, "the sensible Superior."

Yet Lizzie was typical, too; she was by no means unique in her strange

isolation. Kate thought of Myra Keating, agonizing over a fancied cancer for years, yet silent, because she had asked in prayer for her Purgatory in this world; she thought of her own Aunt Maggie, who had one day confided to her with tears that she never would rebuke Charley and Harry because she had taken a vow that she would regard her brothers as "her cross." And Mollie Carey, who stubbornly, devoutly "offered up" one unborn child after another as sacrifices in connection with a long-ago vague girlhood prayer that she would never have a child that might live to commit a sin. Kate had seen poor Jim Carey, a baby-loving, simple man, grieving, growing gray and old, under the constant sorrow and disappointment. But in his wife's grief there was the same exultation that shone now in Lizzie's eyes, the flame of martyrdom.

"We Irish are a queer, unbalanced lot," she wrote to John, "but God knows what a cold, hard place the world would be without us!"

Martin and John were to come up to the mountain camp on Saturday afternoon. Tom was already there. It was customary for Tom to drive the larger car down to the village on Saturday mornings, and leave it there awaiting John, returning to camp in the service wagon that made the trip every day. John's hour of return was sometimes uncertain, and he liked to feel that nobody was waiting for him.

Today Kate told Tom that he must take the little old Ford to the village, the big car was out of order.

"Don't ask me what's the matter with it," said Kate, "for whether it's one of those things that have to be scraped, or one of the things she 'hits' on, or the starter, or what it is, I couldn't tell you under chloroform. But anyway, she won't move."

"That's funny," Tom mused, opening the hood for long and vague investigations, tapping, rattling, adjusting, and directing Lizzie, who was fearfully installed in the front seat for the purpose, to advance the spark and the gas controls.

"Don't ask me to, Tom," pleaded Lizzie. "She may suddenly blow up and kill you!"

"For heaven's sake be careful, Tom," Kate added, with unusual uneasiness. She was standing watching them, her baby on her arm. "I'm as nervous as a witch this morning, anyway; I feel as if something awful was going to happen!"

"Don't ever say that!" their grandmother, straightening her little old back, in its chocolate-flowered purple sateen, gesturing with a loamy trowel, and blinking at them from a face of the contour and color of a walnut-shell, said solemnly. "I'm one for signs and warnin's," she added. "There's manny a wind has howled down my chimbly, and me sleepin' like the babe. But leave it onct begin to talk, chucklin' to itself like," Mrs Walsh went on impressively, "and there's death in it. An' last night, wasn't there a sobbin' little sound far up the chimbly?"

"Grandma, for heaven's sake!" Kate entreated, half laughing, half impressed. Lizzie looked genuinely terrified.

"Whisperin' and laughin' as if all the banshees of Drogheda was in it!" finished the old woman, triumphantly. "I yelled to you, Kate, if you don't disremember?" she asked.

"I don't recall Mr Drogheda at the moment," Kate told her. "But why he should have a special bunch, or gang, of banshees, I'm sure I haven't the faintest idea."

"No, but you didn't, Grandma?" Lizzie implored, really frightened. "You didn't call Kate last night?"

"Indeed she did!" Kate answered. "But she said it was that her old blue comforter had slipped off her feet."

"That was me little inthrigue," said the old woman, much amused. "And I ast you, Kate, did you hear noises up the flue?" she added.

"And I said I didn't," Kate reminded her.

"An' you said it was some dir'rty crime I done, that was on me mind!" her grandmother added, with elation.

"And so it was!" Kate said, kissing the leather-colored, warm old face.

"Don't push me little bonnet off me, Kate!" the old woman said, captiously, returning to her garden-bed.

Kate seated herself upon an upturned keg, studied Tom's efforts interestedly.

"Can you find it, Tom?"

"I'll be darned if *I* know what's the matter with her!" Tom, pale, romantic, his black locks sweeping in disorder across his white forehead, said disgustedly.

"I wouldn't take any chances," Lizzie said, warningly.

"Oh, take the Ford, Tom!" Kate said, carelessly. "Leave it by the station for John, come back in the service car. And send someone out from the village to fix this car!" And as Tom abandoned the big automobile as temporarily useless, the burning question arose, as was usual, as to whether Frank and Jim might accompany "Uncle Tom" to the village, to return in the service wagon with old Hong, the Chinese factotum, and whether, in case of their obtaining permission, Rosemary also might go.

In the end they all went, Tom returning with them, flushed and happy, in the service car, at luncheon-time, with a load of mail, ice, vegetables, meat, cases of ginger-ale, boxes of peaches, enormous packages of laundry tied with weak strings, and the new sandals, which all the small Kellys immediately assumed, dropping boxes, socks, old shoes, and wrapping paper everywhere in the process. With them came a mechanician to fix the large car.

But Lizzie, in all the confusion, was oddly silent.

"Kate, do you really feel that something awful's going to happen?" she asked once, waylaying Kate in the bedroom doorway.

"Well, I feel queer—nervous," Kate answered, quite truthfully.

"Do you believe Grandma really heard noises up the chimney last night?"

"Very likely," Kate answered, sensibly. "There was a lot of wind last night."

"Maybe it's just that we've been praying," Lizzie said, a little self-consciously.

"Yes," Kate conceded; "that does make me nervous. To ask for a sign, you know."

"Maybe we oughtn't to have done it!" Lizzie suggested, trembling.

"Oh, Lizzie, if we loved God, and know He loves us, why should we be afraid?" Kate asked, and Lizzie was silent.

Three o'clock came, four o'clock, and the old grandmother retired to her own somewhat remote cabin for her daily nap. Kate had just said that if Mart and John had managed to catch the one-o'clock train from town they would be in the village now, when the telephone rang, and she jumped nervously.

She and Lizzie and Tom were down on the Lake shore, with the children, but the clear trilling of the little bell reached them, and the cook's loud summons, "Telfome ling!" left Kate in no doubt. She handed Lizzie the baby, and ran into the house.

A few minutes later she came flying out again, and Lizzie got to her feet and screamed when she saw her face.

"Quick, Tom!" cried Kate. "There's been an accident! John's all right, but Mart—they think he's under the car! Take the big car—that man fixed her—and go as fast as you can! My gracious—my gracious——"

"Mart!" Lizzie screamed.

"They don't know—they don't know——" Kate said, breathless and distracted. "John's all right, it was John I talked to! It's down by the old mill, Tom; you're to pick John up there—the car's turned upside down in the gully. Lizzie, you poor child you," Kate said, frantically, as they all ran toward the garage to expedite Tom's start, "you've got your sign now!"

"Oh, my God—oh, my God!" Lizzie whispered. She had turned deathly white. Kate handed the baby to the nurse, and just in time, for as Tom swept down the road Martin's wife quietly fainted.

She was conscious again when the men returned, fifteen minutes later, but as Martin came with the others into the sitting room where she lay, she became faint again, and their laughing and crying explanations found her weak and bewildered, clinging to Martin's square, hairy hand, and alternating between tears and a weak sort of shaken laughter.

"I wasn't in the car at all!" Martin explained over and over. "I'd gotten out, in the village, to get some cigarettes, and I thought of *course* John knew I wasn't in the back seat!"

"I came out of the post-office and climbed in, and drove off, thinking he was in the back seat!" John added. "I even spoke to him. I said 'All right, Mart?'"

Lizzie laughed faintly, hysterically, and the old grandmother gave a loud crow, and clapped her brown old hands.

"Then, when I got up to the mill," John pursued, "she skidded badly in the dust. I shouted to Mart, jumped free, and the next I knew she was upside down in the ditch!"

"Not upside down, exactly, sort of on her side, and tipped," Tom amended.

"I ran in to the power station," John added, "and telephoned Kate, and I'm afraid I scared her unnecessarily, and poor Lizzie too."

"To have *you* worked up and excited, old sobersides!" Mart said, affectionately to John.

"Well, I confess I lost my head!" John admitted.

"I don't blame you, John, it was a terrible scare for you!" Lizzie said, loyally. Everybody had ginger-ale, the little boys stumbled about with glasses, and there was a full hour of scattered and excited conversation about "the accident" before Kate could follow her husband into their room and shut the door.

John, who looked tired, grimy, and white, then displayed, almost for the first time in her knowledge of him, a certain sulkiness.

"You did it beautifully!" Kate assured him, enthusiastically, with an embrace.

"Yes, and some time you'll get caught with the goods, and then you won't feel so smart!" John answered her darkly.

"Oh, well, I won't mind," she said, with a dreamy look. "But, John, it was *wonderful,*" Kate resumed, in deep admiration.

"You know I don't think you have any business to let me in for a thing like this!" John reminded her, resentfully.

"I know you don't, darling," his wife agreed, serenely. "And I say that I think you were a little angel to do it, and so you were!"

"I suppose the wreckers that came up after the Ford will spread it in the village that I came home drunk. Nobody but a fool could have gone over that bank near the mill!" John said, bitterly.

"People go over everything, everywhere," Kate consoled him.

John, now in the soothing process of exchanging his city clothes for comfortable ranch garments, spoke next in a slightly mollified tone.

"What did you do to the big car?"

"Oh, I just opened the battery box, and jerked the connection loose, the man from the garage fixed her in five minutes," Kate said, glad to be even partially restored to favor. "Is the Ford a ruin, John?"

"No, she's hardly hurt. I drove her to the side of the road, opened the door, started her toward the bank and stepped out—that part was simple. But I'll swear," John added, scowling, "it made me sick, even though I knew it was a frame-up, to hear the glass and wood crash!" He toweled vigorously for a moment, regarding with disfavor his wife, who sat smiling, with absent eyes, in her favorite low rocker. "Is that a new dress?" he asked, in unwilling admiration of the bright head with

its chestnut rings of hair, the flushed lovely face, and the thoughtful, black-fringed blue eyes. Kate was leaning back, the exquisite slenderness and firmness and roundness of her body outlined against the white wicker; her slim ankles, in transparent brown silk, were crossed; her sturdy low shoes were square-toed, like those of a child.

She looked down at the well-washed creamy swiss that had been crimson, then pink, and would presently be white, and smiled.

"Not very!" she said. "Do you like it?"

"I like *you*," John said.

"I went out," said Kate, "and at the risk of Hong's sticking a knife into my back, made you cherry pies for dinner!"

"Yes," John conceded, reluctantly, "you can be cute about it, and act as if I was a kid of ten, but just the same you'll be caught with the goods, some day, playing Providence! You've made poor Lizzie think that she's had a sign straight from God."

"Well, and how do you know she hasn't, darling?" Kate said, lovingly, now on the arm of his chair, with one arm about his neck. "It's all done for love, John, and you can't get away from that! Here's poor, superstitious Lizzie bound by a silly old vow she had no right to make. Here's darling old Uncle Peter mourning around and saying that although he had four sons there'll never be a Cunningham grandson! Here's Mart married to a wife that's no wife at all, and both of them unhappy. How do you know they didn't come here to me, as a sign from God, and how do you know that the idea of all this didn't come to me as another sign from God? I don't know why God need always send the Angel Gabriel or a thunderbolt! Love is always working miracles. What's an old Ford——"

"An old Ford?" John demanded. "I might have gone over the bank with it! Lizzie might have died of the shock. I tell you I felt rotten when I saw poor Tom racketing down the road to the rescue, in the big car."

"As for Lizzie, the jolt was good for her," Kate said, unsympathetically; "and Tom Cunningham's getting a regular Walsh smugness where everything except his own comfort is concerned! Aunt Mollie babies the life out of him. He talks to me by the hour about the advantages of staying single, and what fools people are to let themselves in for housekeeping and children. A good scare won't hurt him. Cheer up, John, you've done your part gloriously, and now you watch me do mine. Come on out now, and play with your baby, she's gotten so she misses you! She raises up her little head whenever she hears a car coming up the road—she looks too cunning!"

Some hours later Kate entered, after an unanswered knock, the guest bedroom where Lizzie was installed. Kate was in the old blue wrapper against which the sleeplessness and woes of four little Kellys had been soothed, for seven long years, her glorious hair hung in braids upon her shoulders.

Lizzie wore her nightgown, with a silk kimono over it. Her own hair was braided, and oddly becoming so; she looked young. She jumped nervously when Kate came in.

"Lizzie," Kate said, simply, "where's Mart?"

"Well, I suppose he's gone up to his little cabin," Lizzie answered, breathlessly. "When I left the sitting room he was talking to John!"

Kate sat down, regarding her steadily.

"Do you, or don't you, take what happened today as a sign?" she asked, after an uncomfortable silence.

"Well, yes, I do," Lizzie admitted. "Not but what cars are turning upside down on the roads every Saturday and Sunday the season through," she added, in an apologetic tone. "But still, I know what you mean, Kate, and of course it does seem so. But I felt that maybe, after a while, I'd tell Mart about our novena——"

Kate rose.

"I really thought you had some conscientious scruples about the whole thing, Lizzie," she said, coldly; "and that was why I suggested prayer. But I see now that it's your own stubbornness and conceit that have gotten you. Now," Kate added, as Lizzie shrank back and covered her face with her hands; "now, I'm done with you, my dear, and I'll tell you why. You took a solemn marriage oath two years ago, and then got out of it by working on Mart's sympathies, pretending that you didn't know any thing about marriage! Now you've asked for a sign from God, and you've gotten it, and you admit that you adore Martin, and that he loves you, and here you are—quibbling again! Just one word more," Kate finished, magnificently. "You've had your own way so far, and you'll probably have it still! But you've been wretchedly unhappy and you'll go on being so. A curse will follow you, because the real person you're pleasing is the devil—the devil of stubbornness and pride, and the sort of mind that makes the good, pure things of life dirty! Personally," added Kate, "I'll never speak to you again—I wouldn't dare. You've broken two solemn oaths that I know of——"

"Kate," Lizzie whispered, ashen now, and clawing blindly at the other woman's shoulders. "Don't talk so! God knows I never meant to break my oath. I've known I wasn't going right, because of the sorrow in my heart——"

Kate caught at her hands, turned toward the door, opened it to the solemn mountain night that was cold and furry in the clear moonlight.

An arm of the screened porch ran out against the garden; the grapevines threw a rich mantilla of lace upon the drive; the tops of the trees rose in solemn spires above the Lake toward the steady bright throbbing of the stars. Some twenty yards away, with its square window showing a pink glow of light, among the low branches of the pines, was the log-cabin where Martin slept.

"Go up there," Kate directed Lizzie, briefly. "You're in God's hands

now. You asked for guidance, and you've gotten it. You'll never have a happy moment if you disobey the sign."

"What'll I say?" Lizzie asked, returning after one brave step.

"Say? Oh, anything," Kate said, feeling that if she did not immediately cry she would immediately laugh. "Tell him your clock's stopped! Ask him if he has the right time."

Lizzie made a brief sound between a hysterical laugh and a sob, and Kate kissed her. Then Lizzie went slowly but unhesitatingly up the dark path, and Kate heard a dog rouse, and saw the Airedale come about the house and join her, and heard Lizzie speak to him.

The cabin door opened, and both Lizzie and Mart were silhouetted against the pink light for a moment. Then Lizzie went in, and the door closed.

Kate stood in the spare-room doorway, watching. Her face was stern, but it wore, too, an odd, an almost motherly smile. The light behind her was out, and she was entirely invisible in the darkness, staring idly at the moon-flooded night, the grapevines through which white beams pierced like streamers, the blooms of roses and syringa and Grandma's "Lady Washin'tons" robbed of all color, and pallid in the heavy dews.

"If that cabin door opens," Kate said, almost aloud, "I'm done with Lizzie Cunningham for life!"

But the moments passed, passed, and the cabin door did not open. The solemn stars throbbed, the moon freed herself from the tree-tops and drifted clear of the clouds. Night noises, the woodeny creak of an owl, the crackle of a twig, sounded in the deep woods.

And presently the light in Mart's cabin went out.

CHAPTER XXX

In the quiet sunshine of the mornings Mollie and Allie went to church together, and afterward to market, reaching the big Howard Street house for luncheon. Very often nowadays Charley Walsh came up to luncheon, for his incredibly shrunken old mother lived with Mollie and Peter now, comfortably installed in what had been Ellen's room with Cecilia years ago. Maggie spent the larger part of her time in Portland, Oregon, where Harry had at last found a job and employers adapted to his peculiar needs, where his periodic absences were overlooked, and his patient and underpaid services reaccepted after the inevitable interval of rest and recuperation.

Harry had an agency for a remarkable tonic called "Earthvim." Two or three times a year his sales fell off completely, because of what Maggie always mentioned reluctantly as his delicate stomach, but during his normal periods he did well, "because he's so gentlemanly," said Maggie. His mother and sisters suspected designs upon Harry, on the part of an overblown grass-widow, and hence Maggie was always glad to be with

him, keeping his house, and warning him against entangling alliances.

At other times she was with Mollie, and when Charley drifted in to lunch, as he frequently did, even when his advice or services were not needed in Tom's behalf, they always fell to talking of the "children": Cecy's strange, almost insulting, content in her quiet convent walls; Peter's reliance upon Mart and his injustice to Tom; Ellen's social successes. With the events in the Prendergast, Lynch, Crowley, Cudahy, and Riordan families to review, the horror of Dick Dimond's career, the changes, births, deaths, illnesses there was never any lack of material; indeed Mollie and Maggie would often talk on deep into the night, rubbing cold bare toes with the sole of a cold bare foot, yawning, sniffing, yet talking on and on.

They praised all the children: Cecy was a saint; Ellen was said to be one of the most popular women in society; Mart had never given any one the taste of shame in his life, as his grandmother expressed it, and Kate, it was generally conceded, was unique. Her simple goodness, her happy motherhood, her hospitality, charity, gaiety, would, to quote the same authority, "have set up two of her. Kate," said her grandmother, impressively, "was one that glory would never die on."

But Tom was their darling. His very frailty only made him dearer. That once in every month or six weeks, or, at longest, once in every two months, he subjected them all to a day or two of dark and troubled moods, disappeared, caused them another twenty-four or forty-eight hours of acute anxiety and uncertainty, and was then deposited, sick in soul and body, in his own big bed, to be comforted and encouraged back to health and sanity again, drew him close to them all. He was like a baby, they knew that he needed them. Not by a hint, not by a glance, was Tom ever rebuked, unless sometimes he caught a glimpse of his mother's reddened eyes, or connected the pallor of Maggie and Allie with their midnight prayers for his welfare.

And between times he was able to repay them all. He teased them, he sang to them, he amused them with the hundred little stories that such a nature as Tom's gathers upon its daily round. They laughed themselves into tears at him; even his father, stocky, florid, very gray now, shook with silent mirth at this eldest son's spirited description of the simplest event.

Tom knew everybody, was at home everywhere. He could talk of the boxing ring and fascinate them. He drifted in and out of the night courts, knew judges and policemen intimately, described scenes in the emergency hospital that made the women draw quick breaths. He told them about the drug trade; they exchanged scandalized glances.

"If you'd only been here last night, Kate," Maggie would say to her niece. "Tom got goin'—you never heard the like!" And Kate felt she could forgive the ne'er-do-weel cousin a good deal when she saw Peter getting out the domino table before dinner.

"Feel like a little game after dinner, Tom?"

"I suppose you call that pathetic attempt you make a game, do you, Pop? It looks to me like a kid playing blocks!"

"All right, young feller me lad, maybe you won't cock yourself up so much after a game or two."

"I'll take a couple of dollars off you, Cunningham," Tom would assure his father, good-naturedly. He was almost always good-natured, and when he was not, it was always the "dengy fever" coming on him, the women said.

And after all, it would have been a lonesome house without him. Big, empty rooms, the old nursery, Paul's old room, the "girls' room." Silence, rep curtains, stuffed chairs, drawn shades, and Grace Nolan announcing meals to which only elderly, gray, wrinkled women, and one old man gathered. Grandma rarely got downstairs, she tottered about the middle floor contentedly, rattling her old Crozier beads in the chapel, basking huddled up with a little knitted shoulder-shawl about her, in the streaming winter sunshine in Paul's room, listening like a blinking old brown owl to Mollie and Lizzie and Maggie, and sometimes weeping a little over Kate.

"Is he good to you, Katie?" she would ask, clinging to the strong young arm, and patting it with little strokes.

"Who? John Kelly? He'd better be!" Kate would answer, hardily. "I'll bump his head against a wall and drag—no, but look what he gave me!" she might break off, displaying the new furs, the new ring.

"That's right, dear. You tell him Grandma said he was always to be kind to you!" the old woman would falter, smiling through tears.

One bitter winter afternoon Kate chanced to stop in for a brief call, to find unusual stir and happiness in the old house. Ellen had come in from Burlingame, with the children, to spend the night!

Mollie and Peter had not seen their youngest daughter for actual months; Ellen occasionally telephoned, and said with great warmth that she was going to "run out" to see them, immediately, but she never came. She was the happy, occupied wife of a fashionable physician now, with a cottage at Pebble Beach, and an interest in the amateur golf championship. Mollie had fretted for years over the casualness of Ellen's motherhood, but Ellen was strangely impervious to suggestion. She accepted advice from no one. She and Robert had left their three little girls with good nurses, and departed to Germany for a year's research work some time ago, and although Mollie had gone sometimes to sit in their model nursery with her baby granddaughters, and had found nothing actually amiss, she had grieved over them bitterly.

But now Rob had started for Los Angeles to attend a conference, and Ellen said that somehow she had felt homesick for Mama. So here they all were, and Mollie was ecstatically happy padding about making them welcome, putting an extra cot in the old nursery for the smallest girl, bustling, adding her own happy voice to the babel of voices.

Kate had two of her own children with her: her namesake, now rosy

and strong, and the first-born, a tall, freckled, shyly smiling boy with missing front teeth, who delightedly marshaled his own small sister and the little Costellos into the first noisy childish game that had echoed in the big rooms for many years.

"Mart's comin' to dinner with Lizzie, and won't he be tickled?" Maggie commented, delightedly, as Peter came in, to be kissed with all her old affection by Ellen, and regard his granddaughters with shining old blue eyes. Mart and Lizzie lived across the bay now, and were rarely away from home at night.

"Well, then, I'm going to telephone John, and we'll stay, too," Kate stated, firmly, and felt a little twinge of heartache at beholding her uncle's look of deep satisfaction.

"Do that, Kate. That's what the big place is for!" said Peter, eagerly, clumsily puttering about in his desire to prove how welcome they were.

Mollie sent a careful message to the kitchen, to which was returned a hospitable answer that sure, everything would be grand, would Mr Cunningham but serve the creamed crab rather light, for there was lashings of beef, and leave them wait a little later, so that Nelly could run them together some biscuit and make another corn pudding on them.

Trays came upstairs, in the dear old way, for the children; beds were turned down; the Costello children's beautiful little nightwear was brought to light. Their small cousins were sent home after the upstairs nursery supper; John came in Kate's car, and Mart; Tom came home; laughter and footsteps rang in the hallways.

"Oh, this is the way it ought to be!" said Mollie, when Lizzie and Kate, Ellen and Maggie, she and Allie, and the old grandmother, were holding a sort of upstairs caucus before dinner.

She had been a critical and captious grandmother a few years ago; Ellen headstrong and resentful of suggestion. But both were changed now. Ellen's first flare of independence had faded into something more rational; Mollie's loneliness had taught her a lesson.

Ellen asked her mother, in an undertone, if she thought there was anything in the old theory that children might just as well have nursery diseases and get over them? Mollie was heard to admire the perfect physical condition of Patricia, Virginia, and Marie Therese Costello, and to say that she, for one, couldn't tell how children could be took through a whole winter without a sneeze.

"Mine would always have colds come Thanksgiving," admitted Mollie. "Not serious, although Daisy started with nothin' more than a heavy cold!"

"May Kennedy's boy turned black on her, and had one convulsion after another," Maggie was beginning, when her mother, who was slightly deaf, said clearly, to Lizzie, "Well, I guess you've got your girl now!"

"Oh, Lord bless us, I hope so!" Lizzie said, with a happy smile and a deep sigh. "Mart says he'll send another boy out to Father Crowley!

Oh, they're the death of me, the three of them, and when I think what four would be!" Lizzie, whose favorite topic was young Martin, Paul, and Peter Cunningham, said with the air of a contented martyr. "Mart came in yesterday, and weren't all of them under the sofa, and he and I sat down, to have a little talk, and the first thing we knew——"

"I suppose I ought to have a boy, for Rob!" Ellen said, unguardedly, and there was a moment of constrained silence. To all the other women the thought of any predetermination where the souls of children were concerned was horrifying.

"Marie Therese," Ellen realizing that she had made a mistake, said with an uneasy laugh, "is almost five, and it would seem terribly funny to be in for the whole thing over again. But Doctor Costello is mad to have a son."

"They're both nice—boys and girls," said Kate's rich voice, slowly. Mollie glanced at her significantly, and the look of both mothers met through a quick film of tears.

"It's hard to bury them, dear, isn't it?" Mollie said then, softly.

"Oh, Aunt Mollie! No matter how little they are," Kate answered, a little huskily. "And he was so strong, one of the biggest babies I ever had—not like Kit, who was such a pale little scrap! And I was so well," she added, with trembling lips, "and so proud! I said to John, he came flying in, you know, 'Here's a caller for you, Mr Kelly, who weighs in at nine pounds! I thought *then* he looked peculiar, while not as he should have looked."

"Never mind, Katie," Lizzie said, tenderly, "you still have five darlings left!"

"Comma, as Tom says," Ellen added, and they all laughed.

"Kate," said Lizzie, when they were going downstairs a few minutes later, as some little lingering instinct of shame occasionally urged her to say, "you know that old foolishness of mine? Well, I would have got over it gradually, by myself, in a few months more——"

"Oh, certainly you would, Lizzie!" Kate said, warmly.

"Any woman who would put a good husband through the Purgatory I put Mart would be actually sinful, unless it was only for a short time," added Lizzie.

"Well, of course!"

"It was this," said Lizzie; "that my mother, God rest her, never talked to me, and everything I got, I got out of books, do you see? or from the life of this saint or that——"

"I know!" Kate agreed, kindly. "But you and Mart Cunningham can thank me for your married happiness and your three fine boys," she added, in her soul, with a sort of spiritual laughter deep within her.

When Lizzie passed her, she found Ellen's arm about her waist, on the broad old stairway.

"Kate, they love this so, doesn't it make you feel ashamed?" Ellen said. "We ought to do it once a week!"

"I wish we could do it once a month," Kate suggested.

"Oh, do let's!" urged Ellen, in the old schoolgirl way. "And if they go up to camp this year," she added, "I'm going up for a week or two, with the girls—I really mean it!"

"You'll only be a few miles away from me, you know," Kate reminded her, approvingly. But she knew that Ellen would not do either thing. Life had carried Ellen away from Peter and Mollie for ever, and to Ellen's children Grandma and Grandpa would be only hazy, amiable figures seen at long and irregular intervals, having nothing actually to do with Patricia, Virginia, and Marie Therese.

Yet Ellen's heart ached with a sort of homesickness tonight. Her wealth and social success, her exacting and adoring husband usually satisfied her. But of late Rob's radical handling of certain domestic matters had somewhat alarmed Ellen, and tonight back in the old atmosphere she felt a great rest, a sort of spiritual ease, in her soul.

Rob reasoned, and logically enough, that there was no fundamental cause for all this sentimental love between parents and children, and Rob, cutting as cleanly through all Ellen's preconceived ideas as his scalpel might cut through living tissues, had said that when his girls were older they need never feel obliged to show any filial devotion or duty toward *him*.

That was sufficiently iconoclastic, but there was more. Rob's one idle morning was Sunday morning, and of late years he had not only entirely omitted church-going, but he had been annoyed if Ellen absented herself because of spiritual duties. If one of his daughters babbled to him cheerfully of Purgatory or original sin, Rob of late had assumed a slightly impatient air.

"If the nuns are going to make bigots of them, put them in some other school," Rob commanded his wife.

"Oh, Rob, the Catechism isn't bigotry!" Ellen was even a little frightened. Where would all this end? Pat and Jinny and the baby must have their little serge uniforms, their processional veils, ther dear familiarity with the black-clad sisters, the echoing clean big halls of the convent, the chapel streaming with sunlight and candlelight for Benediction.

Her faith had always been to Ellen the safe harbor to which every thought and act of childhood returned; the ultimate topic in all the long conversations between mother and aunts. And strongly implanted in her as it was, it alarmed her to feel that Rob, with his own peculiar theory of ethics, his conviction that surgeons like himself must do everything possible for every wrecked and crippled body, because there was no such thing as a soul, Rob possessed over her a stronger influence still.

Ellen did what thousands of young mothers do: kept the surface as serene as she could, assuming when with Kate or her mother that she and Rob were still "practical," ignoring the subject with Rob as much as possible, and trying not to feel too uncomfortable when a week-end

visit carried them away from all church influences, and golf, gossip, and bridge filled every instant from Saturday to Monday.

Tonight she determined that she would bring it all back, tell Rob once and for all that she was determined to see her own dear family constantly, and resume, to the last tiny obligation, all the practices of her faith.

But she knew, even now, that she would not. And Kate, touched by the radiance of Ellen's face, and the older faces, knew, too, that simple as it seemed, a family reunion like this one might not be managed again for another year—for several years.

Meanwhile, it was a happy hour. Ellen took the arm of her father's chair, and Peter put his arm about her, and now and then she laid her face against his, and kissed him in the old way. Tom was next his mother on the davenport, Kate and John together, Mart sitting with his hand linked in Lizzie's somewhat bony, lifeless hand.

Grace Nolan came to the door, gray and spectacled now, to say, "Dinner is served when you are them new shades never come, Mr Cunningham," much as she had said it for so many years, and Kate saw in the dining room the old high chair that had been Daisy's and then Paul's and then empty for so many years, and the old clock, punctually swinging, and the big looped red curtains, and the display of silver on the sideboard.

Afterward they went back to the fire again, and looked up at the old faded family pictures: Mollie bustled and crimped in her wedding dress; Mollie pressing a firm young cheek against the lumpy, expressionless face of a new baby in flowing embroideries; little Tom freckled and long-legged; little Mart in a torn straw hat; Cousin Kate snapped while visiting them, up at the Lake, and getting them all into trouble.

"That was the year Ellen was the baby, Papa, do you remember? When Tom cut Cecy's face open——"

"For heaven's sake let bygones be bygones, Mollie!" begged Tom.

"Oh, will you ever forget that?" This was Allie. "When I seen the blood streamin' over the poor child——"

"Cecy doesn't show it now," Kate commented. "My, but she is the happy-looking mortal! We went over on Sunday with all the children."

"What did you think of it?" Peter asked.

"Of little Daisy's memorial? It's just too beautiful! It's filled, you know, and the girls were swimming. Ellen, have you *seen* the swimming-pool Uncle Peter gave them, for Daisy?" Kate demanded. "The gymnasium is for Paul, and the pool has 'In memory of Margaret Cunningham, three years old' cut over the arch; it's perfectly exquisite."

"I wanted to have the dates, but they talked me out of it," said Mollie. "Born, November first—it was All Saints' Day, and I well recollect I couldn't get to Mass. Mother O'Birne came in to see me, when Daisy was only a few days old, and she says, 'Well, Mary—' for she was one would never nickname the name of Mary. She used to say she had no

patience with the Mollies and Minnies and Mays—'No,' she'd say, 'it's the grandest name of all, didn't our Lord choose it for His own mother, and are you girls too proud?' she'd tell the lot of us—May Hanna and Minnie Harrington and quite a crowd of us used to go to old St Rose's."

"Where is it?" Ellen asked Kate.

"Well, you cross the tennis-courts at the back, and go up——"

"I must go over, and take the girls to see Aunt Cecy," Ellen murmured.

"Oh, do go! You'll have a lovely day!"

"And is Cecy happy?"

"Happy? She is turning into one of those wonderful nuns, you know, with the matchless skin, and starry eyes, and a sort of mysterious smile. She lives for those novices of hers, and I gather that they idolize her."

"I always hoped she'd be a nun, she was marked for it," said Mollie. "My oldest daughter I made a sacrifice——"

"Heroic!" breathed Kate, thinking of the rosy little girl with the bobbed curly hair who had been her baby Rosemary a few brief years ago.

"You make a nun of either one of our girls, and you'll do well, Kate," John Kelly said, smiling at his wife. "I never saw such a bunch of wild Indians—I don't know which are the worst, the girls or the boys! That Kit of ours hangs her head, and looks up under her yellow hair as if she was shy, but she'll give them all cards and spades."

"That's Kate here to the life," Maggie Walsh said. "You'd think she was a little saint, when she was a child, smilin' at you. And all the while some deviltry you'd want to skin her for——"

"But you never *did* skin me," Kate said in an undertone, her luminous beautiful eyes upon her aunt. And she thought of the old Turk Street cottage, the fog moving mysteriously among Grandma's Lady Washin'tons, the shabby odorous kitchen, the cold bedrooms where sick uncles moaned and tossed, and, moving throught it all, a silent little yellow-headed motherless girl, watching, crying sometimes, worrying about the troubles of her elders as only a child can worry. That rice and potato saucepans were all always burned, and always smelled; that dish-towels were all always mud-colored and soggy; that money was always lacking; that life was unfair, difficult, lachrymose; this had been the child's law.

She had grown tall, had somehow gotten through High School, walking home with her arms locked about Maysie Crowley's waist; she had "gone for bread," spongy bread wrapped with breakable string, to the grocery that smelled so strongly of coffee and yellow soap; she had wept, protested, raged, over the same dented, iron-gray dish-pan and the same nicked cups, for years and years.

And ah, what visits to Aunt Mollie had meant then, visits to this same ugly, impressive house to which they all returned in charity, in condescension, now! To enter this big hall, to feel her shabby little shoes touching the heavy carpets, and see the light streaming upon the great

staircase, Aunt Mollie prosperous, rustling in silk, Cecy's new cl so wonderful, with their "Emporium" or "City of Paris" tags dangling on them; how little Kate Walsh had loved to come to Mollie's, and how rarely it had been managed! Kate especially rei bered the day of Daisy's funeral, when she and Tom had discovere chocolate in shiny white and gold paper, in some big storeroom d stairs, and had taken all they could find, just before being assigned places in the carriages.

"Oh, Mollie, God knows it's hard to bury them!" Grandma had and Kate, at nine, had innocently wondered what made it so. She quite simply buried dolls and dead birds many a time!

"What was it, Aunt Mollie?" she came out of a dream. Mollie addressed her.

"I was only saying, Kate, that now's the happiest time for you John. When they're little, when they're all about you, with their les and their skates——"

"And John and I are always saying that we'll thank God when get the crowd of them raised!" Kate said, with a laugh.

"The minute they're raised, you lose them," Mollie assured her, s ing. Ellen, listening, dropped her face against her father's forehead, he tightened his arm about her. So she had jealously entrenched her a thousand times in her stormy babyhood, but it was many years now s Peter had felt the dearly loved weight against him and heard the imp ous young voice so close, so confidential, in his ear.

To honor the great occasion, the old grandmother had been guided, half carried downstairs, and was now ensconced in an armc so deep that only her lean little brown claws and the purple and bl crocheted cap that covered her bald little head were visible at a ca glance. When her children or grandchildren spoke, her sharp little e moved shrewdly from face to face, and occasionally the sound of a go chuckle issued from her neighborhood.

But she spoke little herself. She stared at the fire, and her drea went back—back across the sunshiny years that had brought a baref peasant girl from a sod cabin smoked by a thousand peat-fires to a m sion in the old Mission of San Francisco.

Again the cackle and confusion of a Kerry market-day, the shaw the women bundled into strange mysterious garments to be known their lives simply as "me cloes," gossiping in the cool Irish sunshi Again the big ship, the strange food, the clean blue ocean racing t lessly past the brass-topped rail; heavy rains, when everyone was coo below stairs, winter sunshine again, when they gathered on deck, a watched the rising towers of the New World swim into the pale b distance. Brooklyn, and a policeman cousin who was paid—God love he never was paid twenty-five guineas a month?

Then a train, smelling of kerosene lamps and orange peels, for lo dirty days of glare and dust, and then old San Francisco, with her gr

wooden houses steeped in pale western sunshine upon her encircling hills, and gulls over the bay, and cable cars rattling up Market Street.

And then Tom Walsh, mad with joyous passion for her youth and sauciness and beauty. How his prosperity had scared her, a feller that owned two cottages on Turk Street and was going into the livery business for himself at twenty-five!

How happy, how happy those old simple days had been! Days before the "incandescent light," and the telephone, and the "horseless carriage"! Days before reinforced concrete and moving pictures and Victrolas and gas stoves!

The sidewalks of wood, the streets rounded cobbles, a trip to Oakland, or an afternoon listening to the band in the Park a real holiday. She and Tom, and with them little Charley and Harry, in their decent black stockings and polished shoes, with blue ribbons on their straw hats, and anchors printed on their clean shirts, and Maggie and Mollie in petticoats three deep, and heavy starched white dresses, and flowered "chips," what happy innocent expeditions were theirs!

Widowhood. Hard times. Another husband, again a Walsh, and the new baby Robbie, and then widowhood and hard times again. There had been happiness in all this, too. But not like that earlier gay happiness, of the ship and the blue water, of Tom Walsh murmuring absurdities in her flattered young ear, of her first squirming, sturdy little baby.

And then Mollie's brilliant marriage, to a rich man, Mollie's fine babies, Mollie's griefs and joys.

"Well, my own weren't perfect," mused the old lady. "But Mollie's been a good daughter, and poor Mag's a saint. Charley and Harry has their faults, but there's a lot of good in the both of them. Leave us see how much better Mollie's lot turns out—or Katie's!"

Harry had sent her the heavy lengths of the black silk she wore. Maggie had made it. Where would Pete's Tom be if it wasn't that Charley was so good-natured, and so providentially equipped, to be his guide in his darker hours; and was there ever a more successful daughter than Mollie?

At the end of more than sixty years of wifehood the old woman looked back upon life without resentment or regret. It might have been better, but God knows, she mused piously, it might have been worse!

Mollie's wandering thought followed somewhat the same lines. She dreamed of little Daisy, of little George, of Paul, her three angels, safe beyond the reach of hurt and sin for ever. Never to be disillusioned, to be blamed, to be chilled and saddened in life. Never to be "made nothin' of," as handsome brilliant Tom was, by his father and brother, to be childless and wifeless all his days because of his one forgivable and only occasional weakness! Never to turn cold to his father and mother, as Ellen had; never to wed a stick, like Martin's Lizzie. And as for Cecy, Mollie gave an almost audible sniff when her thoughts reached her. All very well to betake yourself and your problems to a cloister, but that

wasn't life! A fine world it'd be if everyone was to be afraid of living in it!

Mollie thought of her early pride as a rich beloved young wife in her beautiful group, the handsome boys, the lovely little girls, the adorable white-caped, innocent babies, and her heart ached hard and heavily. She did not remember all her strangely shortsighted, strangely changeable prayers for them, nor that some of the most earnest of these had been answered, to her own agony and despair. She was content to say sadly that God knew best, life was only meant to be a "trile" to the poor pilgrims struggling on the hard way of the Cross.

And she looked at Kate's happy, unconscious face, Kate, whose problems were all of little flannels, bottles, bumps, arithmetic, and coasters. "Life'll learn her," Mollie reflected, without malice, yet in a deep and obscure satisfaction. "What say, dear?" she added, aloud, realizing that Tom had spoken to her.

"I asked you if, on the whole, you like us, Mollie?"

"I was just thinkin' of the plans we had for the crowd of you," Mollie said, rousing. "There's not one of you done what we thought you would!

"It was always my hope—wasn't it, Pete?—that Tom here would marry and give us a houseful of children," Mollie went on, believing her own words. "And there was a time when it seemed as if it might be you, Kate. But it wasn't God's will, for all our prayers!"

"Never mind, I have my grandsons," Peter said, contentedly, with a proud look at Mart. "Jim Riordan was speakin' to me but a day or two ago about it. He's a great fan for Mart here, and he says, 'We'll have another Peter Cunningham in here before you drop out, Pete! There's few,' he says, 'that can look to having grandsons take their places, in these days of dear-knows-what and divorces and all the rest of it,' he says."

"It's little Mart has the head for figures on him," Lizzie, always eager to speak of her sons, put in. "Yesterday I was 'phoning the grocer——"

"I don't like you to talk as if you hadn't *two* sons in the business, Pete," Mollie gently chided her husband, when some nursery anecdotes had been exchanged.

"Certainly I'm in the business," Tom said, promptly. "I'm in it in an advisory capacity. I go into Pop's office, and he advises me, and there you are!"

"The other day——" Mart's undertone paused, and he looked about the circle with a smile. "Go on talking!" he commanded them, and then, addressing them all, with a smile: "Well, all right, all listen. I was just going to tell Kate that when we moved to Mill Valley, Lizzie and I were going over old boxes and things, and we came across 'Holy Joe'—Paul's little old 'Holy Joe.' Do you remember, Kate?"

"Do I remember?" There were tears in more eyes than the blue ones she turned on him. "Darling that he was," she said, in a low tone. And

she seemed to see Paul again, with his triangular pale, radiant little face against the pillows, and hear again his high exulting voice ringing through the big house: "Mart! Come up! Holy Joe——!"

Perhaps they were all taken back to the days when the long fight for Paul's life had absorbed all the vitality, all the interest and love of the big household. A silence fell. Then Ellen said drowsily:

"I'm having a good time!"

"Well," Mollie said, rousing herself from deep thought, and furtively wiping her wet eyes, "one thing we never done was push any one of you! We gave you your faith and your health and let you go on your own ways!"

"There was never one of you infloo'nced by us!" Peter added. "You've made your mistakes and had your triles, but me and Mama has done no more than stand back and watch you!"

"I don't think any one of us is much to write home about," Tom commented, frankly.

"Cecy's Mistress of Novices," Kate reminded him; "Ellen's husband is at the head of his profession; Mart's second vice-president of a big business, and Tom," she ended her summary prettily, "is the darling of all hearts, and is now about to sing to us——"

"Accompanied by the gifted Mrs Jawn Rose Kelly. The piano has been kindly loaned by the late Miss Mary Walsh, of Turk Street," said Tom.

"No life is absolutely happy," Ellen added, as they laughed. "Sometimes the richest people are absolutely the wretchedest!"

"It isn't to be, in this world," Maggie said, firmly.

"We're all too rich," Kate contributed, animatedly. Only two generations away from the poverty of a sod cabin, she had come far enough to learn this incredible thing. "Honestly, that's it, Uncle Peter," she added, seriously, as everyone exclaimed derisively. "If you were just a fairly successful grocer in the Mission here, and all of us working people, we'd be at home here every Sunday night, and Aunt Mollie would cook the dinner. Money separates people—there's no help for it. I hope my kids will be poor!"

"Don't say that, Kate, for it means the roon of us all!" Mollie said instinctively, humorously, yet half seriously.

"I wish our grandparents had all been perfect," Kate went on whimsically.

"What good would that do us?" Mollie asked.

"Well, we'd be better——" Kate began, vaguely, and stopped.

She fell silent.

"Come on, Tom!" she broke into the pause, in a different tone, and rising, "let's all sing."

She went up to the square piano, snapped on a great softly glowing lamp, began to rustle through piles of music.

Tom took his place behind her. He thought to himself that he could

remember when Kate had been the prettiest girl—absolutely the most beautiful girl!—of his acquaintance. He had felt very sentimental about her, in the old cousinly days when she used to fly laughing and giddy up to his room, and sit panting with Cecy on his couch, watching him put the final touches to his dressing for one of his mysteriously independent evenings. She had been ready to glow with excitement over an evening at the Orpheum, then.

Now she was still "nice," beautiful eyes, color still high, a few gray hairs in her early thirties, her old girlish coquetries gone for ever. Kate was matter-of-fact, merry, capable now; she still braided her splendid hair about her head, but with no particular concern for its appearance.

Well, it didn't matter, Tom thought. She would never look at another man than John, nor he at any other woman but his wife; John never really saw Kate, he saw the vague ideal of wife and saint he had made of her.

"Wonderful evening, Tommy?" she said.

"Awful!" he answered, captiously. "I feel ninety! We're all living in the past——"

"Well——" She smiled dreamily, willing to concede anything. "But we're pretty happy now," she protested. And in a lower tone she added: "*You're* happy, Tom?"

"I'll never have a wife, Katie," Tom said, "I'll never have a kid of my own——"

It wrung her heart. He felt a little pang of contempt, knowing that it would—that it had been said for that purpose. Kate, getting plainer, heavier, grayer every day, pitied only the men and women who had not her nursery! Bottles, blocks, cribs—Lord, Tom mused, by what alchemy was a high-spirited, beautiful woman brought to the point when these were all she needed for happiness!

Yet tonight he had truly felt an instant's pang, seeing his mother's pleasure in the coming back of the children, seeing that stout, short arm of his father's fitted about Ellen's slender, elegant waist. Nothing in life was particularly worth while. Maybe raising kids, working for them, loving them, came nearer than most things!

"We're a great lot, we Irish!" he said, adjusting the music rack.

"Do you ever wonder," her fingers were finding the chords. "Do you ever wonder what it would be like not to have a drop of Irish blood in your veins?"

"Oh, holy cats!" said Tom. "I'd rather be dead!"

"See if you can find the one 'Twas dyin' they thought her, and kindly they brought her to the banks of Milwater, where her forefathers lie,'" Maggie suggested.

"Can you beat it?" Tom murmured over Kate's shoulder. "Just to start the evening gaily——"

"Sing 'Silent, O Moyle——' That was the one Paul loved!" Mollie requested, with a deep sigh.

"There was a very pretty one about the man that come back home and found his wife had left him," Allie contributed, from her shadowy corner. " 'The valley lay smilin' before me as lately I left it behind, but I trembled and somethin' come o'er me——' "

"I shall have hysterics," Kate assured Tom, under cover of a rambling accompaniment. "All we need is 'Abide With Me.' "

She played "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and they all sang, and "Noel," whose glorious verses Tom sang alone, with all their voices chiming in on the chorus. And they sang "The Minstrel Boy," Peter crying quite openly, and smiling as he wiped his eyes.

"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard,
"Though all the world betrays thee,
One sword at least thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

"That feller could write," Peter commented, blowing his nose as the splendid echoes of Tom's big voice rang and lessened, and crept away, thinning exquisitely into silence.

They sang, "Sail, Baby, Sail," all together, and at "only don't forget to sail back again to me!" Mollie cried, too.

And to some of them, to Peter perhaps, to Kate, and to Martin, who oddly and unsuspectedly possessed the tenderest and most sentimental memories of them all, they might have been children again, presently to be banished protesting to bed, life all unknown, and all ahead.

Tom might again have been the hope and pride of their hearts, handsome and bold at sixteen—at eighteen—at twenty; Cecy, demure and conscientious, might only have left the room for a moment, perhaps to accompany, in her old sisterly fashion, the tearful Paul up the long flight to bed; Ellen might have been her father's madcap, safe in sanctuary in his big gentle arm; and Martin, awkward and big and tousled, twisting about over his Latin lesson, and meditating as to the right phrases in which to acquaint his mother with some fresh schoolboy difficulties. Mollie might have asked, "How's your poison-oak, Baby?" or "Who bust Papa's towel-rack?" in just the same old way; Peter might have pleaded that he could not romp: "Papa's got a bone in his leg."

And little Kate, eager, shabby, weary, burdened with burdens, and the shadows of lives far beyond her understanding, might have come in wistfully to share an hour of all the Howard Street glory and the Cunningham felicity.

The dear, dear children, brown, lean, awkward, annoying, freckled and untidy, and gone for ever! And in their places these somewhat disillusioned, somewhat hardened, somewhat saddened men and women, so soon to be gray, to be feeble and alone, to vanish as completely as those same dear busy ignorant children had!

"Here's one—I always like this one," Kate said. And Tom's voice

carried the words about the homely, handsome, heavily furnished old sitting room, with its photographs, its rep, its majolica and onyx, its cushions and tasseled foot-stools.

So all the little ships come sailing home across the sea,
Their voyage safely ended, their way they've wended
Home where they would be!
They sail across the bar where no storms are,
All dangers passed,
And two by two together,
Come safely home at last!

BARBERRY BUSH

INTRODUCTION

Out of the threescore novels I have written only ten or eleven have a setting other than Californian. A third of my life has been spent away from my native state, but the feeling of home is always here, and I am most comfortable writing about the fogs, the brown hills, the hot sleepy summer days and icy nights, the eucalyptus and pepper trees that fill our patios, the great oaks that dot the hills. Flat places where there are thunderstorms and snows, where autumn leaves grow red and August nights are hot fascinate me as they did when first I knew them, but the natural thing is to choose for a new novel the steep streets, the dry sunshine, the cool summers that I know best.

Barberry Bush *is the story of the young marriage between a girl and a poet, and their life in a ruined old hacienda beside the sea, somewhere down on the Monterey coast. The novel has long been out of print, but it was a favorite, and I am continually being asked where it can be found. So it is an especial pleasure to me to bring it back in this form.*

CHAPTER I

"The thing is," said Amy, rubbing the sugar-bowl so firmly that her fingers suddenly bored holes through the polishing cloth, "the thing is that you're twenty-two, Babs, and I'm twenty-four. Within the next six or seven years we'll both marry, won't we?"

"We certainly will," Babs agreed fervently, from the sink.

She plunged the soap-shaker into a pan of hot water, frothed it to foam, slid into it a pile of scraped plates and saucers.

"Well, then, the question merely remains—*whom?*" Amy summarized it triumphantly.

"And when, and why, and where, and how," her sister added.

"Oh, well, those'll all take care of themselves!" Amy said easily. "The main point is: we're *not* going to be old maids!"

"I suppose not," Babs admitted uncertainly. And for some reason her breast rose and fell suddenly on a sharp sigh.

"But, now—*this* is what gets me," Amy, with her air of fresh childish interest, went on animatedly, blowing at a silver spoon to dislodge the packed white powder on its chased handle, "do we know the boys now—the ones we are going to marry, I mean?"

Barbara Atherton laughed, and answered only with a faint shrug. She swept the dish mop gently about the receding tide of hot water in the sink, inverted the dishpan, wrung out the mop and set it on the window sill above the sink to dry. Then, with a fresh checked towel, she began rapidly to wipe the glasses and plates that were pyramided on the clean sink board.

"It seems likely," she observed doubtfully, in a silence.

Amy, who had gone off into a dream, roused herself.

"What does?"

"I say it seems likely that we'll both marry men from Cottonwood. Or near here, anyway."

"Oh, I hope so!" Amy said, awakened, "I love it—'round here."

"I believe," Barbara observed thoughtfully, "that you do."

"Well, you do, too, Barberry Bush!"

There was a second's hesitation. Babs carried the hot, clean plates to the dresser, and stood there, stretching her young slim arms from shelf to shelf as she put them away.

"Of course I do. Only—I've never seen any place to compare Cottonwood to."

"Barbara Atherton! You've seen San José and Santa Cruz millions of times, and San Francisco and Redwood City."

Babs hung the last blue cup on its brass hook, turned about with a smile.

"That's true. I forgot them. But we've never really lived anywhere but here, you know."

The kitchen was hot, clean, shaded, orderly on this burning afternoon. To the girls it was an important and romantic spot. Although actually it was a commonplace room, conventionally furnished with a checked blue and brown linoleum, with two of the plain wooden chairs that are known the country over as "kitchen chairs," and with a white stove, a white table, and a white cabinet. On the wall was a large calendar, embellished with a Corot painting, and lettered "Mackenzie & Co., Hardware, Plumbers' Supplies and Sporting Goods, Cottonwood, California."

Amelia Atherton, from her babyhood, had worn the far more appropriate title of Amy. Barbara was usually "Babs" in the family circle, but many years ago her grandmother had given her the special title of "Barberry Bush." Old Mrs Bush had been a dignified and beautiful figure in Cottonwood's history, and her motherless granddaughters had spent much of their time with her; it was she who had given Barbara her stately name, Barbara Bush Atherton, and the nickname had followed as a matter of course. With them all, the name meant a mood of affection and approval, and Barbara secretly loved to hear herself so called.

Since their grandmother's death, the girls had kept house for their father, incidentally "arting" their little kitchen, as Babs expressed it, and lending to this utilitarian apartment what the younger sister further poetically characterized "the touch of a woman's foot."

Whatever the touch was, it was expressed in the cream-painted woodwork, the blue cotton curtains, the speckless order and simplicity of blue plates and white saucepans, the potted lobelia adding one more blue note in the side window, and the little breakfast alcove furnished with a narrow strip of table crossed by a cotton runner from Perugia, and decorated, on its two white walls, with colored prints.

"We live by the backs of magazines," Barbara once said. "We gloat on budgets and tables of calories, and for anything headed 'Discoveries' we make a simultaneous leap and fight over!"

Much of all this was true. Their father, Professor Arthur Choate Atherton, had been forced by poor health to give up his chair in entomology in a southern university some years earlier, and had come back to Cottonwood, California, where his motherless little girls had spent all their babyhood with their grandmother.

After that they had lived with Grandma in an ugly bay-windowed house in Washington Street, where the shops were beginning to encroach upon the chicken yards and side gardens of an older day. And when Grandma died, they had sold the ugly big house and bought a pretty little one, the very house in whose kitchen the girls were busy now.

The old Professor, who spent his days roaming about searching for California beetles and moths and parasites, and his nights writing articles about them, admired his daughters enormously. He told them that they were practical, as their lovely mother had been, and that it was much wiser and better to be practical, in this cold world, than a dreamer like himself.

But as a matter of fact, Barbara was not really practical by nature. She, like Amy, had had a good deal of responsibility thrust upon her when very young, and she had risen to her burden rather from necessity than choice.

It was only a form of dreaming, her enthusiasm for new ways, for strange meals, and "arty" kitchens, odd frocks and queer books. She visualized them, when she found them in the backs of magazines, and Amy, who was her slave, was the one who actually brought them into being.

Half seriously, half wistfully, Barbara would mention blue bowls or vegetable suppers, the desirability of practice in French, or of hollyhocks outside the kitchen window, and Amy would quite seriously bring home bowls, seeds, books of verbs, and tomatoes and carrots.

Babs would perhaps have forgotten them entirely by the time they appeared, but her enthusiasms were always easily reawakened, and she would display such dashing originality in her manner of employing them that even Amy would immediately forget that she herself had had any hand in the matter.

Amy was clever, staid, sensible, sweet. Barbara was a wild, brilliant creature of varying moods and violent emotions. Amy was talented, as all the town knew. But Babs, which nobody suspected, was already a personality in embryo, and half her vagaries and heartaches came from the fact that she was instinctively and quite unconsciously seeking self-expression, in any way, by any path, through any door.

The younger sister was pretty, with blue eyes, and a soft snug cap of chestnut hair. Amy's nose was short and straight, her hands and wrists nicely turned, her skin clear and almost colorless, her mouth small and dimpled. But Barbara was always more, or less, than actually pretty.

Sometimes she was merely a tall girl, with splendid bronze curly hair tangled over a low forehead, and hanging in a loose knot on her neck, a girl with blue eyes suspiciously frowning, and wide scarlet mouth bitten in moments of thought or argument by big, square white teeth. Golden freckles were powdered over Barbara's milk-white skin, and when she was excited apricot color blazed on her high cheek bones. Her eyes were long, dark-lashed, and strangely sweet and appealing in expression; "sweet eyes," Barry du Spain called them sometimes; sweet even when Babs was at her homeliest.

But at her prettiest, on those rare occasions when freshly brushed curling bronze hair, skin, eyes, frock, and mood all matched, she could be startlingly handsome. Sometimes a new boy in town would meet her

so, at a beach picnic or a dance, a starry-eyed creature all laughter and gipsy beauty, and would come to call upon her a few evenings later, to be pained and amazed at the bored, oddly dulled, plain girl into which an unfortunate mood had metamorphosed her.

She did not care much about her appearance; indeed, from her very teens Barbara had worn an air of abstracted and busy indifference to a great many of the interests of her school group. She was always adventuring, experimenting, reaching beyond the placid limitations of the life in Cottonwood, trying to find something bigger, something more essentially her own. All the other girls imitated certain things about Barbara, but she never imitated anyone.

And behind her, adoring and scolding and bewildered, came Amy, consoling her for her many tumbles, and inserting, beneath her castles in the air, a solid foundation of practical help and common sense.

"If you had to marry one boy in Cottonwood, now, Babs," Amy pursued, on this particular afternoon, "whom would you marry?"

"One? Amy, I'm ashamed of you! Do you mean that you think of marrying *more* than one?"

Amy giggled, screwing the powdered box-top firmly over the polishing powder.

"You know what I mean," she said.

"I suspect you of meaning a great deal more than you seem to," Barbara answered shrewdly. She gathered Amy's new-polished silver into her fine big hands. "You've been after something all afternoon," she added suspiciously.

"I have not! I was just wondering," Amy answered, flushing and laughing guiltily.

"Well, whom would *you?*"

"If—I—had—to—marry—a—Cottonwood—boy——" Amy mused, pursing her lips, narrowing her eyes and staring into space—"maybe Joe Dodge," she offered, temporizing.

"Joe Dodge!" Babs echoed, with a scoffing laugh.

"Well, Fatto Roach," Amy suggested. "I'll tell you whom!" she interrupted herself suddenly. "I'd marry Ward Duffy, in a minute! You know—the Duffys who keep boarders on Cherry Street."

"Amy, you wouldn't marry a doctor!"

"I think Ward's a darling," Amy was ruminating, more and more pleased with the thought. "Next time we go down to the river, let's ask Ward. We've never asked him. I used to love him—let's ask him."

"We couldn't ask him before. He's been away at Medical College for five years."

"I know. But let's ask him! He's kind of homely," Amy admitted affectionately, "but I'll bet he's smart. I'm going to ask him."

She stopped, smiling, rose to put her silver polish away, hung her apron behind the closet door, and washed her hands.

"Let's go down to Washington Street—they'll all be down there, it's much cooler," Barbara suggested, "and we can have some sodas."

"Yes, but now you, Babs. Whom would you marry, if you had to marry a boy you know right now?"

"Oh, let me see——" The younger girl bit her lip, squinted.

"Barbara Atherton, you are the most affected girl I ever saw!" Amy said. Babs burst out laughing, and her color rose.

"You think I could get Link Mackenzie away from Inez?" she asked self-consciously. This was sheer nonsense, and Amy laughed. Inez was not popular.

"I think you could get anyone away from *anyone!*"

"Well, Inez may have Link," Barbara said seriously. It was without concern, as Amy noted with a sinking heart. "But I like Link," Barbara added. "We have the same birthday—Christmas Eve. And ever since I was about fourteen Link has *always* sent me a present!"

"And if Inez did, whom then, Babs?"

"Oh, Fox, I guess. Fox Madison. I've always thought he had such an adorable name. Harry Lawrence Fox George Madison."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said the other girl, hurt.

Barbara glanced at her quickly. A penitent look crossed her laughing face, and she colored brilliantly.

"You mean you think I'd take Barry?" she said, rather low.

"Well, wouldn't you?" Amy asked fearfully.

"Not—" Babs cleared her throat—"not if he didn't ask me, dear."

It was at moments like this that she seemed, to Amy, so much older than she was. Amy could not have said a thing like that, she was infinitely less simple than Barbara, for all her sense and sweetness. Barbara's odd, splendid humility sometimes took her sister's breath away.

"But if he did ask you?"

Babs' head was hanging, her eyes averted.

"I don't know," she whispered.

Amy came to the screen door beside her, tried to look into her face.

"You wouldn't marry him!"

No answer.

"Babs, he hasn't a penny. You'd have to go down the Coast to that awful old deserted ranch of his and raise pigs! All he can do is write poetry—and poets never have any money! And he's so selfish—and he's so stuck on himself."

Barbara laughed briefly, mirthlessly.

"I don't think he's really conceited—Barry. It's just that he—he *sees* things differently from the rest of us."

"I'll say he sees things differently from the rest of us," Amy muttered rebelliously. "He'll spoil any party, to get the seat next to you; he'll read about that darned old Congo, or about going down to Kew in lilac time—wherever it is!—until everyone but you goes to sleep, and *you*

only stay awake out of politeness. He thinks I'm a fussy old maid——"

"I'm not going to marry Barry du Spain, Amy," Barbara said as the other's voice failed. She put her hand on Amy's shoulder, and looked a little sadly, yet whimsically smiling, too, into Amy's eyes. "In the first place, he isn't going to ask me," she went on. "He isn't the kind of boy who falls in love with *anyone.*"

"Except himself!" thought Amy. But she had the tact to be still.

"And in the second place," resumed Barbara, who was perhaps talking as much to herself as her sister, "in the second place, he is too rare —and queer—too much Pan and gnome—to marry."

"Your life," Amy said solemnly, suppressing a desire to ejaculate first: "I'd pan *him!*"—"your life would be perfectly crazy. You'd never do anything the way other people do, and you'd never know where the next meal was coming from. You'd live like the penguins on Abalone Rock."

"And I might like that!" Barbara murmured, dimpling, her cheeks roses.

"Your children," Amy added firmly, "would be freaks."

"I adore freaks!"

"Barbara," pleaded Amy, abandoning argument, and appealing only to the emotions, "*please* don't marry him!"

"But I'm not even thinking about it, you idiot!"

"Only—you *do* like him."

The traitor blood came into Babs's cheeks; she lowered her eyes again.

"Well, come on! We're going to get some sodas," she changed the subject briskly. "Bring out my white hat, and while you're getting yours, I'll give this stuff to the chickens."

She picked up a covered granite-ware pan from the table on the kitchen porch and went down two plastered steps into the backyard.

It was a pretty backyard, one of a friendly neighborhood of pretty backyards. The Athertons lived in the new development called "Las Haciendas" on the south boundary of the town; theirs was one of fifty charming six-room bungalows, plastered in cream and distempered pink, and roofed with pipe tiles. The gardens were walled high and quaintly, the square windows grilled, and there were arches and patios, flagged paths and fountains, all on a small but perfect scale.

The Athertons had no car in their garage, but it was useful to house their father's precious Buff Orpingtons, eleven fowls, six chicks, and a rooster, and it also sheltered flower pots, garden tools, watering hose, and some lockers in which their father carried on modest entomological experiments.

Barbara, as the chickens pecked about her feet today, was joined casually by a tall, loosely built young man, who stared at her through glasses and smiled sleepily as he said:

"Aren't you home early, Barberry Bush?"

"Hello, Barry," the girl smiled, with a quick analytical glance. "Early? No, it's almost five."

"Oh, Lord! I thought it was about three."

"And what have you been doing all day, that you could lose two hours so casually?"

"I went out to the ranch this morning—on Tomas's milk wagon; twelve miles. And Rita scrambled me some eggs. And then I went out to Abalone Rock for awhile."

Barbara smiled at him indulgently, scattering the last crumbs. It didn't matter what Barry said to her, or in what mood he chanced to be. His measure, by that mysterious ruling that is the secret of romantic girlhood, was always the exact measure of her own heart.

He did not suspect it; indeed, she had only recently made the discovery herself; it still astonished and fluttered her, in the secret depths of her soul. It had only been very recently, during the last few months, that she had been able to face it. She loved Barry du Spain. This—this funny shaky feeling, this strange glowing and quivering and thrilling, Barbara told herself innocently, was the great thing itself—was love!

It made her feel oddly like a little girl, sometimes. But more often she felt motherly toward Barry, infinitely older and wiser and more developed than he.

"There is a copper shine on your brown hair," the man said now, in the unmistakable rhythm of the sonnet, "as if from out your mother earth you drew bright metal strands to make a part of you—a fillet, like her hand in blessing, there! Yet, I, your poet——" He stopped short.

"Barry, you aren't making that up as you go along!"

"Well—kinder——"

"Well, I think that's perfectly charming! Why on *earth* don't you write them down and make them into a book? Now, come into the kitchen and let me get a pencil, and go on with that poem 'To Barbara, in a June Sunset.'"

"Oh, forget it! Speaking of sunset, *look* at it, Barberry Bush! And you talk about kitchens and pencils!"

She stood beside him, erect and slender and tall, but not as tall as he, even though his broad shoulders drooped a little toward her, and the characteristic attitude of his head was to be just a hint lowered toward the world. Barry was an enormous person, at twenty-five, lean, loosely built, strong. His bones were big, his shoulders wide, his arms and legs long. His hair was black, worn in loose shining scallops pushed carelessly from a thoughtful forehead, and his pleasant, blinking eyes were very, very blue. He had a husky, drawling voice, a beautiful mouth whose smile showed splendid even teeth, and the rather high cheek bones and slightly underslung jaw that hinted at his Spanish blood.

"By golly, I met the most interesting man I ever saw in my life today!" he said now suddenly.

Babs had been dreaming; wondering what it would be like to have this

man's love. She could love him, of course, any woman could. But suppose *he* loved, some day? Suppose he suddenly began to experience the trembling and the ecstasies; ah, what a titanic and glorious person Barry would be then!

"Barry, were you ever in love?" she wanted to ask him. But because her own feelings toward him were so vital a part of her being, she did not dare. She concentrated her attention resolutely upon what he was saying.

"Cotter, that's his name. He's the tall red-headed guy who goes around the Nation House, cleaning things."

The girl gave a scandalized laugh.

"Not the person who sweeps the sidewalk and washes the windows?"

"That's the one," Barry agreed eagerly. "He's a wonder. It seems—it's the most interesting thing you ever heard!—it seems——"

"Babs, aren't we going down to Bartell's for sodas?" Amy called patiently, at this point, from the house.

Babs, who had been laughing indulgently at Barry, felt a little check. Somehow his enthusiastic friendship for the servant at the Nation House did not seem so amusing when Amy, coldly unsympathetic, was also a listener.

"His father was in a circus," Barry resumed the story, when they were walking down the street, "and this kid, when he was only about eight, used to have to——"

Amy's patient glance met her sister's eye. Barbara found herself wishing that Barry, by some inspiration, might some day suspect that Amy did not like him.

CHAPTER II

THEY WALKED NORTH through the plaster gates, with chains and tiles, at the entrance of Las Haciendas, and through the edges of the town's aristocratic quarters, where the Poetts and the Wilsons and the Mackenzies lived, in old-fashioned wooden houses surrounded by enormous trees and deep gardens.

Then came a wooden bridge across a little river, and then, irregularly set, and with other streets crisscrossing it at all sorts of angles, came Washington Street, the principal thoroughfare of the town, faced on both sides with shop windows and dentists' doorways and the big entrances of hotels. Cars were parked at angles between painted white lines, all along the curbs, and there was a crowd outside the Post Office; the mail was in.

Sunset light was streaming along Washington Street, and the brick spire of an old church, set squarely across it, half a mile away, finished the western vista with a note of Old World picturesqueness. All the left-hand streets led to the sea, and wore little signs: "To the Beach," "To the Casino," "To Skinner's Auto Park," for the benefit of visitors. On the

northeast side of the town there were low cliffs, on which were perched cheap little summer hotels, not yet opened for the summer season. The town of Cottonwood doubled its population during the school vacation. But the natives, like the Atherton girls and the Poetts and the Roaches, rather despised this noisy and intrusive element, and liked the quiet, unpopular seasons the best, when their own town seemed to be restored to them.

At this hour, on any pleasant afternoon, groups of young persons always gathered at Bartell's for sodas and gossip. Bartell's candy store was like a club; there were other candy stores, and almost all the drug stores had soda counters. But the correct place to go was Bartell's.

The large dark space back of the shop had been decorated with mirrors, lattices of green wood, large artificial grape leaves, and dangling electric lights. It was furnished with small tables and small tippy chairs with bronze wire legs. On its walls were signs regarding fresh fruit sundaes and banana specials. One sign represented a soda-fountain clerk, life-size, smiling and beckoning in so ingratiating a manner that strangers sometimes signaled to him, to the undying amusement of Bartell's habitual customers.

Here Amy, Barbara, and Barry, nodding and calling greetings to friends as they came in, found a small table, whose damp top was immediately swept by a wet rag, in the same gesture with which the waitress put a card before them. They studied the card interestedly, although they knew it by heart. It was spattered with faint pink and yellow blots.

On one side of it was printed the list of regular sodas and drinks, hot and cold; on the other were Bartell's Specials: "Bartell's Ambassador," "Bartell's Sunkist," "Bartell's Best Girl."

" 'Bartell's El Dorado,' " read Amy. " 'Vanilla and mocha ice cream, apricots, marshmallows, orange ice, chopped nuts, meringue and maraschino cherries. Forty cents.' "

"What are you going to have, Amy?"

"Oh, plain vanilla—like always."

"Orange ice," said Barbara, a sudden cloud over her mood. She wondered if Barry would remember to pay for the ices.

If he had the money and thought of it, of course he would. But neither condition was probable. Loyalty to him and fear of his failing her began to make her nervous.

Suddenly a squarely built, grinning man joined them, slipping into the fourth chair.

"Hello, Barbara—Amy. 'Lo, Barry!"

"I didn't see you, Link," Amy said cordially.

Lincoln Mackenzie's beaming smile included them all, but his special glance was for Barbara. He was just Barry's age, she knew; the two had gone all through grammar and high schools together. But he looked older than Barry.

An ugly, nice red face, smooth tawny hair, and a hard jaw that sug-

gested remote Scottish ancestry. Barry, who had all the faun's fear of convention and formality, despised Link, because he was the richest boy in town and had gone into his father's hardware business, after college, with the quite open intention of making even more money, on his own account. But everyone else in town liked Link.

He was not tall, but he was hard and athletic in build; he had done better in sports than Barry, though he was some thirty pounds lighter. A quite unaffected, simple, cheerful sort of person, vigorously and wholesomely interested in his car and his business, his father's health, his sisters' love affairs; he wore his social prominence modestly, and became embarrassed the minute he was made to feel different from all the others in the crowd.

"Inez Wilson's cousin got in on the mail train," he began without preamble. He put his thumb under "Ginger Ale," and nodded to the waitress, before going on animatedly: "Say, she is one little Georgia peach—believe me! I was over at the express office, looking for some rolls of fence wire, when I heard Inez's voice. She was meeting this girl —oh, boy! Eyes! Plenty of eyes."

"Marianne Scott—that's her name. Inez told me last week that her cousin was coming," Babs answered interestedly. "Pretty, is she?"

"She's a peach."

"Inez is going to give her a party, I know."

"She said something about it tonight. I'm going up there to dinner—at least, I will if Dad doesn't mind."

"What type is she, Link?"

"Oh, I don't know—sort of sleepy eyes. She was all mussed up from the train, of course."

"Well," Barbara submitted, "I guess you'll all come down to the Concert and Dance?"

"Tonight? Oh, that's right, I forgot. Oh, sure, we'll all be there. Dad's coming down, and the girls—Ellen Clapp's beau is here from Santa Cruz —Ellen's tickled stiff!"

"D'you s'pose she's really going to marry him, Link? She's come so close to it twice before this. Miss Reed, at the Library, told me that Ellen told her that she never was going to marry——"

She paused, glancing with compunction at Barry, who had quite audibly sighed. Barry loathed gossip.

Link put his big hand over the check. "Here, this is mine," he said easily, spilling change on the table from the fingers he had thrust, check and all, into his pocket. "Seventy, is it? That's all right, May," he said to the waitress. "Who's taking you tonight?" he added, to Barbara.

"Oh, Dad and Amy and I'll come together—we hadn't discussed it much."

"Well, I'll see you there, then." They all stood up, began to drift toward the door. It was almost twilight now, and pink and yellow lights were beginning to war with the last daylight in Washington Street. There

were gaps in the lines of cars along the curbs, and the Post Office was deserted.

The heat of the day had dropped with the sun; there was a delicious coolness in the air, and the heavy new leaves of the trees stirred pleasantly in the twilight. Pepper trees, eucalyptus trees, fruit trees. Here and there a branched, sturdy live oak, on some vacant corner lot, and in the old gardens beyond the bridge, magnolia and locust and poplar trees, and rose trees throwing their tentacles a dozen feet above the roofs of garages and barns.

Among the lower limbs of the trees, strips and lines of red light still lingered; the west was on fire. Even while the Atherton girls and Barry du Spain walked home, the day ended, and moony squares of pale light from dining rooms and kitchens shone in angles and bars among the little Spanish houses.

Here a grating showed a warm glow, there an iron lantern was lighted to show an arched doorway and a solid wooden door, or some unseen light caught the shining leaves of a palm.

Professor Atherton was in the kitchen when they arrived; he had put on the kettle and was placidly reading. His daughters kissed him enthusiastically, tumbling the fine snowy hair that was his one beauty. For the rest, his was an intellectual, plain face, disfigured by heavy spectacles and lighted by an expression always amiable and sympathetic.

"Pop, are you going to the Elks' Concert tonight?"

"Pop, do you just want salad, or shall I do you a meat cake?"

"I object," said Professor Atherton, "to Pop."

"Dad, then."

"Dad, too," said the Professor, without resentment, "is a disrespectful term."

"Babbo mio!" Barbara, draping her long person across him, in the rocker, her feet in the air, and half strangling him with a strong arm about his neck, substituted affectionately.

"What would you like them to call you? Father?" Barry asked, from a seat at the kitchen table.

His face was flushed with interest and pleasure now; he was a different being from the man who had so recently been bored and had yawned so impolitely at Bartell's. Familiarly at ease, here in their hospitable kitchen, he was again his best self, radiant with friendliness and sympathy. Barbara, glancing at the beautiful face under the loosened satiny wing of raven black hair, thought that so might the young Byron have looked, in the flower of his splendid youth.

"Papa is nice," timidly suggested the Professor. "We used to call my father 'Papa.' "

"Papa!" they all scoffed in chorus. And Babs added, " 'Papa' always reminds me of cheap picnickers, streaming along the beach, with the sand blowing into their eyes, and a lot of kids following, yelling, 'Papa!' "

"No, dear," Amy said maternally from the stove, before which she had knelt to light the oven, "we won't call you 'Papa.' "

"You are popped, as it were, for life, Arthur," Barbara added, laying her forehead against his own, and kissing his hair lazily.

"Call him 'Pater,' " Barry suggested, tipping his head to study the older man thoughtfully.

"I really think—and whenever we discuss this I always say—that 'Dad' is best," said Amy.

"We are so bold we call you Father, God," Barry began. "You to whose altars older worlds brought fear, to us are so familiar and so near we call you Father. Only——"

He stopped.

"Go on!" Babs directed him, listening, and scowling anxiously.

"Anon, sweet coz!" promised Barry. "I always hitch on that damn' fourth line," he complained mildly.

"At that," said the old man, "there are those among us who couldn't get that far."

"Barry, we're having hot rolls and what Babs calls 'salad du garbage.' " Amy said. "Do you want more? There's some chopped meat here."

"Babs, you don't care whose appetite you take away with your disgusting remarks, do you?"

"I devoutly hope that name *will* take your appetite away." Barbara, now busy with the contents of a big china platter, said inhospitably. "For this is positively the most delicious salad even *I* ever made, and there's none too much! I've thousand-islanded the dressing, as an experiment," she went on. "It's just the regular Women's Exchange mayonnaise, with half as much chili sauce dashed in—but look, look at the asparagus and eggs and string beans and beets—our own beets!—and that alluring little suggestion of watercress. Professor, kindly move a few inches out of the main line of traffic. Amy, don't forget your rolls. Sweet pilgrim, coming to us from strange, far lands, put this platter on the table, and kindly remember that, should'st thou fall upon thy paunch, thou 'lt look further for thy faring!"

"Thousand-islanded is a fair verb, Babs," said her father, wedging himself against the window in the little breakfast alcove where they had almost all their meals.

"I'll bet I could get one thousand shorter words out of it," Amy boasted.

"How many words do you suppose you could get out of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, Barberry?" Barry asked.

"Birds' brains—that's his trouble!" Babs said to the wall. "Why, you poor simpleton, you could get all the words there *are,* out of the alphabet!" she scoffed, trapped.

"You couldn't get the word 'alphabet' itself, for one," he triumphed. "Nor moon, nor mood, nor pepper, nor butter, nor coffee, nor houses——"

Barbara's incredulous and astonished look softened.

"Oh, well—oh, well—of course, I forgot the double letters!" she admitted, in some confusion.

"Birds' brains," Barry muttered. "What did you do to the nurse, Professor?" he asked.

"What nurse was that?" asked the Professor innocently, putting up a fine thin hand to ward off more salad from the spoon Amy was wielding.

"The nurse that dropped Barberry on her head when she was only a dear little innocent, unconscious baby."

Amy laughed deliciously. They all laughed.

"Babs, what are you going to wear tonight?"

"Green."

"I think I'll just wear my pink and white. It's so comfortable."

"I'd certainly be comfortable. It's going to be a mob, no one'll notice."

Amy put her elbows on the table, rested her chin on her hands, and sighed happily.

"I'm not terribly keen to go tonight," she yawned.

"I'm terribly keen to stay here, by ourselves," Barry added.

"Oh, come on!" Barbara, with her usual appalling energy, was already attacking the dishpan. The few plates, the bright glasses, flew through her fingers. In fifteen minutes the kitchen was in order, and the girls had disappeared into their own room, to dress.

They had spent a hundred evenings so; it was just an Elks' Concert, with a dance to follow. But anything, in Cottonwood, was an event. The Athertons never paid for tickets to these affairs; there were always friends of their father or grandmother upon whose generosity they could rely. Sometimes they had six or eight tickets to a single affair and could be hospitable in turn.

Tonight, Professor Atherton firmly declining to accompany them, they left the house escorted only by Barry. But before they had walked the five squares between their house and the Town Hall, a young Englishman, Fox Madison, had joind them, and as they went up the main aisle of the auditorium, between the rows of filling chairs, they were greeted by other swains, some of whom attached themselves at once to the Atherton party.

Conversation of a small-town type went on, between the chairs. Barbara and Amy knew everybody, even the crimped and staring smallest of the children; they settled themselves in a wave of greetings.

"Barbara—Father coming?"

"Not tonight, Judge. He became very fractious. I don't know what we're going to do with him."

"Looks like a pretty good programme, don't it?"

"Well, it does. They always have good shows."

"What say?"

"That they always have good shows."

"Someone ought to speak to those boys, down in front. It's terrible."

"Wait until Doc Roach gets here—we'll see a change."

"Hot, ain't it?"

"Well, 'tis. Yet it was real cool outside."

"That's what Ma was saying."

The rough walls of the hall, cut by high windows, had been trimmed with lengths of red-white-and-blue bunting, and there was a splendid flag hung on either side of the stage. The curtain was down, except where it looped itself awkwardly at the right, over a square piano.

The air was hot, and bright lights shone baldly down upon the squirming audience. Almost everybody was seated at least sidewise, if not entirely turned about in his chair, to see arrivals as they came up the aisle.

Barbara seated herself with a wriggle of pleasure.

"I love it!" she said.

"You've made yourself *think* you love it," Barry amended. "You don't really think of yourself as a part of it," he went on. "You only think that these people are amusing and kind, and that you like them. You're not one of them."

She considered. "No, I really do love it."

"You dramatize it," Barry told her.

"Perhaps," she admitted, dimpling.

"The Bunners," said Amy, on her other side, "sent their little boy to say that the Wilsons and Link want us to hold seats for them, near us."

She began to drape her evening coat, and Barbara's, over some empty seats, just in front of them. Barbara's spirits rose; a delicious feeling of being popular put sparkle into her manner and a soft light into her blue eyes. Barry sulked beside her.

"Gosh, I loathe those Wilsons!" he growled.

Babs slipped a slim cool hand into his, unobserved. Instantly his manner softened, and he gave her a sidewise smile.

"Shall we take our lunch and go down to Mission Creek tomorrow?" he asked.

She pondered, smiling. She taught a morning class in the town's nicest private school. But tomorrow, Saturday, was free. Only—only Amy always put her nose in the air at the idea of her marvelous Babs wasting half a day with a moony poet like Barry.

"All right," she consented. They had done this before, half a dozen times. While Barbara rested, dreamed, with her back against a fallen tree trunk and her eyes on the gray stream, Barry read poetry aloud: Keats, Shelley, and the modern Americans.

There was an expectant rustle and stir all through the hall, as the lights waned, and the curtain went creaking up. Barbara saw the Wilson party with Link, wedging itself into the row in front, with much whispering and stumbling and suppressed laughter. But she did not meet Inez's pretty cousin until the intermission.

CHAPTER III

At HALF-PAST TEN the elders had gone home, and the dancing had become fast and furious. A fine mist rose from the floor, and, mingling with cigarette smoke, hung like a haze in the room. Through the haze the saxophones whined, and the shuffling of feet and occasional bursts of laughter and voices merged into a sort of steady dull hubbub as predominant as a sustained organ note.

The air was suffocating. Collars wilted, the men's faces shone, the girls' dresses looked bedraggled, and crisp bobs that were rapidly losing their curl were pushed carelessly from flushed damp faces.

Barbara, as she danced with Link, discussed the Wilsons' cousin.

"Do you think she's so pretty, Link?"

"Well, she looks sort of crazy and Russian—with that black hair and white skin."

"Barry can't stand her."

"Well, I'm not crazy about her. She talks sort of affected. She's a rotten dancer."

"She smokes," said Babs, who did not. "And she let one of the Poetts —Orville, I think it was, put something in her ginger ale—I saw it."

"Oh, well," Link said, with unexpected lenience, "they all do that. That wasn't so bad."

"Link!" the girl said, surprised. "I thought you hated that sort of thing at dances."

The man gave her an odd look; there was something almost speculative in it, as if he saw her or some aspect of her for the first time.

"Let's go outside and get a breath of air," he suggested.

They went to the main door, where young Dr Ward Duffy gallantly offered Barbara his coat. Cold outside, he said, interestedly.

Barbara slipped her bare arms into the light, soft, loose garment, and she and Link stepped out into dark, cool Washington Street. The fresh night air, striking her hot face and parched lungs, was delicious as creek water.

The little Park, spattered with blots and streaks of moonshine, was just opposite the Hall. Rows of cars, unlighted, were parked between. The night was so still that except when the trolley spun by, in a whirl of humming noise and harsh light, they could hear the sea, crashing evenly on the shore, a quarter of a mile away.

Link was not as large a man as Barry, but there was something infinitely more impressive about him. His voice, his strong hands, the keen glance of his handsome gray eyes, the male notes in his pleasant voice, and a hundred other things made Link seem more of a man than Barry. His most trivial comment or statement was taken seriously by his group,

whereas all Cottonwood—and especially young Cottonwood—had laughed at Barry from kindergarten days.

Link was rich, but even if he had not been of an age and nature that take small cognizance of material things, he would have been far more, at twenty-five, than a rich man's son. He was temperate, industrious, conscientious—just a shade too much indeed, of all these good things to seem quite human. Link's wealth seemed a natural appurtenance, rather than an actuating element, in his life.

Barbara had too honest an indifference to money in her own make-up to appreciate this particular quality in him. She never thought of herself as becoming a rich woman, when the other girls teased her about Link as a beau. Wealth, at this particular moment, would have made small difference in her dreams. She did not want many clothes; she would have shuddered at the idea that servants must positively and unavoidably be under her orders.

Books, friends, the beach, her own little waxwork kitchen, her experiments and dreams, were enough. And to these Link could only add companionship, should he prove to be the right companion, and perhaps be the means through which her innocent thoughts might go on to children—she loved children.

Now she glanced toward him, as they strolled slowly between the pepper and palm trees, and saw the glitter of his eyes, in the dark.

"I thought you hated women smoking."

"Well, I do—in a way. At least, I told you I was kind of glad Lucy and Margaret didn't. But—but——"

"But what?" asked Barbara, surprised, as he paused.

They were in a dark, deserted part of the Park. Now suddenly he threw his cigarette away, and caught her tightly in his arms.

Silently, terrified, Barbara bent her body back, her hands hard against his shoulders, her face twisting and jerking madly away from his expected kiss.

"I hate this sort of thing!" she said breathlessly.

Link was not moving. And after a few blind seconds of struggle the girl, held close against him, became motionless, too.

"Link, this is so silly!" she panted, trying to laugh. "I tell you I hate it!"

"Exactly," he said, a little shaken himself, yet with a sort of easy mastery. "I know you do."

"Please——" Barbara began, making a sudden and ineffectual movement to free herself.

"I'm not going to kiss you," Link said unsteadily.

"Then—then why hold me this way?"

"But the point is—you've told me twice that you hate it. But why do you hate it? Most girls don't."

"I don't know about other girls," Babs said, warming, "but I know I do."

"Hate what?" he asked teasingly.

"Mushing," Barbara answered viciously.

"Oh, is this mushing?"

She jerked violently again—again felt the firm grip of the iron fingers.

"I just would like to know why all the other girls in this town will let boys kiss them, and you won't," Link said.

"I do believe"—said Barbara, glancing up insolently at him, with her bright, strange eyes—"you've been drinking!"

"Well. If I have?"

She knew him to be abstemious almost to fanaticism, and a new fear shook her. Suppose he had taken enough to make himself entirely irresponsible?

"Other girls," he was saying, "when they like men—well, they show it. They flirt, they get kissed and kiss back."

"Well, I don't!" Barbara whispered, struggling again.

"Keep still. *Why* don't you?"

"Because I *loathe* it!"

"But you shouldn't. You're young, you're pretty, and you cut yourself out of all this like a nun! When I dance with you I feel as if I was dancing with a nun. You hold off—you talk about Coventry Patmore!"

A reluctant laugh, not entirely unlike a sob, broke from her, and somewhat cleared the air.

"Barbara, how many boys have kissed you?"

"How many—— I think you're very insulting. No boys, of course, except at Hallowe'en parties, and under mistletoe and all that!"

"I thought so," Link said, with a sort of gloomy triumph.

She had forgotten everything but the argument now, and despite the fact that his fingers still kept her an ignominious prisoner, she spoke with natural interest.

"Well, is it your idea that every boy in town shall kiss the—the girl—shall kiss any of the girls you happen to like?"

Link was silent, but he sighed, on a note of despair. He dropped his hands, and he and Barbara walked back in the darkness, toward the windows that were gushing light from the Hall.

The first relieved feeling of getting safely back to her familiar moorings was presently invaded for Barbara by an odd sense of anticlimax. If he had wanted to kiss her, back there in the Park, why hadn't he done it? Was there something about her that not only didn't invite advances, but that actually repelled them?

"You don't smoke, you don't drink, you don't make up, you don't let boys kiss you," Link summarized it.

"Oh, I do make up!" She was almost defending the custom. "That is, Amy and I use powder, when we feel like it, and she often says she'd use rouge, only it always shows on her so. I don't need it—I'd use it in a minute if I did. As for the other things, I don't do them because I don't like them."

"But, Barbara, you ought to want to do them, and give them up because they aren't—well, quite nice."

They were close to the Hall now, and her laugh could ring out unafraid. Instantly the murmuring and laughing in more than one car, parked close by in the dark street, stopped as if by magic.

"That sort of thing, I mean!" Link persisted, jerking his head in the direction from which the amorous murmuring had come.

"What on earth," Barbara asked curiously, "has started you off on this track tonight? Are you so strong for petting parties and hip flasks?"

"You know I'm not. I only feel that—that a girl can carry——"

"Prudishness," she supplied scornfully, as he groped for a word.

"Well, prudishness, then. Can carry it too far!"

"Link, what nonsense! You know very well that all the mothers and fathers and clergymen in the country have been perfectly aghast at the way young people have been going on, at dances and roadhouses, and the way they've been running round in motor cars——"

"I know it. Only—only you're too young and pretty, Barbara, to side with them."

Barbara pondered. Link was, after all, an important person in her world, and she was impressed by his stumbling and ineloquent earnestness.

"I have a good time," she offered presently in self-defence. "I don't sit around talking to the old ladies at dances."

"I know you do—or don't, I mean! But all the fellows know that you won't stand for the slightest—for the least——"

"Liberty." She gave him his word again. "Well, is that so bad?" she asked innocently.

"No, of course it's not bad. But—but things—like kissing, *do* have their place, Barbara, you have to admit that?"

"When you're engaged—yes." The girl answered promptly and dispassionately.

"And how are you ever going to *get* engaged, if you are so standoffish?" Link persisted.

They were walking slowly up and down the sidewalk now, between the dark row of the cars, and the darker, massed foliage of the Park. The girl laughed softly.

"My dear Lincoln, *when* it is the real thing, one—one breaks. One *gives* all that——"

There was a silence. Then Link threw away his cigarette, and said discontentedly:

"Some women never get it, and never want it, and never miss it. My mother was like that. Cool—loving, but not demonstrative. She'd put up her cheek for us to kiss."

"I think your mother was one of the finest women in this town," Barbara countered triumphantly. "I wouldn't want to be any different!"

"Yes, but Mother belonged to another generation. They didn't do the things in her day that they do now."

"Exactly. And I like the old way best!"

"You like to go down to the river with Barry, and have him read his poetry to you," Link burst out suddenly, resentfully.

"Well, why not? Why couldn't marriage be exactly on such lines as that?" the girl demanded. "I think we hear altogether too much of this sex talk. I think the whole nation's gone crazy on the subject. Companionship—that's the priceless thing. Marriage, of course, and children, and friends, and all the rest. But companionship first. I could love a person madly, I know I could, without wanting him to grab me in his arms all the time and kiss my face out of shape!"

"That shows how much you know. I'm never with you, Barbara," Link confessed, a little shamefacedly, a little resentfully, "but what I want to kiss you."

She was so much restored, after the recent indignation and fright, to her own daring self, that she could raise her laughing face toward him, visible in the moonshine and shadow.

"Go ahead!" she whispered.

Again his iron fingers gripped her shoulders, but he made no attempt to kiss her, and he did not smile.

"No, I'll be damned if I will," he growled. "Not while you feel that way about it."

"But back there in the Park," she laughed sensibly, "when I made a fuss, then *that* made you mad, too!"

"We're talking different languages," Link said quietly. Barbara, even while she told herself that she must be right and he wrong, had an odd sense of having failed him, as she walked back to the Hall.

Later, she discussed it with Amy. Amy was sitting on the edge of her bed, rubbing cold cream into her face. Barbara, already comfortable on her own pillows, on the other side of the room, was reading her Bible. Their grandmother had raised the girls with strong religious principles, and they usually read a "chapter," every night, still hearing Granny's cracked, sweet old voice on the familiar words.

It was almost one o'clock. Amy, thinking of entirely unrelated matters, while listening dreamily to the story of the Prodigal Son, yawned undisguisedly and ruffled her chestnut hair.

"Amy, do you think I'm a prude?" Barbara demanded suddenly. "Well, Link does," she added aggrievedly, as Amy laughed.

"Did he say so?" Amy asked, instantly alert.

"Practically."

"Oh, Babs, I think he is really crazy about you!" Amy said elatedly. "Imagine. With all the girls in town after him! I knew his never forgetting your birthday meant something!"

"He thinks girls ought to go in for kissing and petting and all the rest of it!" Barbara observed.

"Link Mackenzie! He does not. Maybe," Amy admitted, "he wanted to kiss *you*."

"No, it wasn't that. But he said that—that side of it was important. The—the animal side. He didn't use that phrase, but that was what he meant."

Amy hesitated, looking thoughtfully at her sister.

"Well—and don't you think so, Babs?"

"Of course I think so—after you're married."

"But—but the point is, Babs, that you can't just decide about it like that. It's an impulse—an emotion—it's like getting hungry. It takes possession of you!"

Barbara flushed darkly.

"I think that's disgusting," she said briefly, in distaste.

"Well, it can be *made* disgusting," Amy admitted, "all those girls going out between dances to sit in cars with boys, and get kissed, and so on—Mrs Cobb was saying tonight, when they brought us home, that she actually hates to chaperon most girls nowadays, even the daughters of her oldest friends, because she never knows what's going on. But—but it isn't *all* disgusting, Babs."

"To me it is," Barbara said decisively. "Oh, I can't see," she went on impatiently, "why there has to be so much fuss about it! Everyone talking about uncontrollable passions! I'd be ashamed to have any feeling I couldn't control."

Amy was silent for a long minute, and Babs innocently suspected that she had entirely lost interest in the subject when she said suddenly:

"Sis, falling in love *is* that."

"Nonsense!" Barbara scoffed, but a little uneasily. "I've been having beaus since I was fifteen."

"That's just a phrase you use," Amy interrupted with unusual firmness. "Of course, you've had boy friends, and men have loved you. But you've never been in love, Babs."

Barbara, with a sudden quickening of heart beats, decided that this was the time for the revelation.

"Amy, I think I am in love," she said faintly. And she added, "with Barry du Spain."

Amy, whose face had lighted at the first admission, laughed scornfully.

"Babs, don't talk nonsense! Why, Barry isn't a *man*. He's just a dreaming kid, a poet. He idolizes you, the way he would a Madonna painted on a wall."

"Do you think he does?" Barbara asked eagerly, diverted.

"Of course I think he does—I know he does, because lately he's been acting so pettish and silly. But Barry doesn't know anything about real love, any more than you do!"

"Any more than I do!" Barbara echoed, affronted. "Well, I'll bet I could have Link Mackenzie tomorrow, if I wanted him!"

"I think you could, too, darling. But I see poor Link's meaning. He

wants you to—well, to kiss back, to sit in his lap——" She stopped, laughing ashamedly.

"Ugh, you make me sick!" Barbara ejaculated.

"Well, I know, and I was only fooling, in a way," Amy hastened to apologize. "But the truth is, Babs, that, for all your smartness, you're only a little girl in lots of ways. You haven't waked up. Now, I'm not half as popular with the boys as you are—or as you *could* be," Amy altered it thoughtfully. "But I understand all this more. You've got to —if you want to get a man and hold a man—you've got to let go, in these days."

"Amelia Atherton, what would Granny say to that?"

"What all the grannies *are* saying, I suppose," Amy admitted meekly.

"Companionship, liking the same things, laughing at the same jokes ——" Barbara began magnificently.

"My dear Babs, any woman could have all that with any man and not do her husband the slightest wrong," Amy said sensibly, in the pause. "Don't talk nonsense! If that were enough, we would never hear of scandals and divorces and the grand passion and all the rest of it."

"Then," said Barbara sulkily, "I devoutly trust that I will never experience the grand passion!"

"Well, you *will*," Amy predicted. "And meanwhile," she added, coaxingly and affectionately, "here is Link Mackenzie, the finest match in town, just ready to fall in love with you, if he isn't already. All you have to do is be gentle—loving——"

"My dear Amy, when we meet Link at Bartell's, I'm crazy about him. When he gets all hoarse and gentle at dances, and wants to paw me—and mutter things close in my ear—and mash kisses on to me——"

"Babs!" Amy gasped and laughed, scarlet, her hands over her ears.

"I'd much rather be down on the creek, making little water-dog villages with Barry!" Barbara finished.

"Well, I don't care whether you marry Link or not," Amy said finally, "but I will say that, if you go on much further with Barry du Spain, making him think he's a genius, and playing around with him as if you were both eight years old, then I'll think you're a fool!"

But, being Amy, she said it so pleadingly, so mildly, so adoringly indeed, that Barbara could not be hurt. It never occurred to her to be hurt at Amy, for beneath everything that Amy said, there ran, sure and strong, the river of her love for her sister.

"Barry's the handsomest man I ever saw in my life, and Inez's cousin said so, too," Barbara said now, subsiding.

" 'Andsome is as 'andsome does, miss!" said Amy. "She can have him. That'd be a very nice match."

"He loathes her."

"Well, you look out, or she'll get Link. She's very different from Inez. She's a siren, that girl."

"She can have him!" Barbara snapped off her night light, threw her

pillow on the floor. The waning moonlight streamed in bars and angles across the room. "Good-night, darling," she said. And Amy, vaguely fretted, and lying wakeful, only had to wait one minute to hear her sister's innocent, deep breathing in her first sleep.

CHAPTER IV

Barbara would have slept less soundly, perhaps, had she been able to hear another conversation, again between two girls, only a few blocks away.

Inez Wilson, the town's richest girl, slender, sallow, fair, and not without a sort of lifeless beauty, was seated on the foot of her visitor's bed. Marianne Scott, twenty-six, dark, strikingly handsome, sat up in her pillows and hugged her knees, and occasionally looked self-consciously at herself in the mirror, far across the darkened room. The girls talked in cautious undertones; the household was long asleep.

"No, not the pretty, neat-looking one. The tall one, with the reddish hair."

"That's Barbara Atherton. They're sisters. The Englishman you liked was with them."

"Fox—what's his name? Yes, he was rather amusing," Marianne said, in her cool, sophisticated tones.

"Fox Madison. He's a younger son—we all think he got into some trouble at home. Anyway, his family in England send him about five hundred a quarter to stay away."

"Exactly! He looks the part. But to go back to the redheaded girls—who are they?"

"The Athertons? Well, they were the big people of the place a few years ago. Their grandmother was old Mrs Bush—their grandfather was an Englishman who came out here in '49, or something, and practically owned the whole place. But their mother died when Barbara was about three, and their father was a professor at some college, and he retired, or something, and they sold the old Bush place and bought a little Spanish bungalow, here, and they live there."

"Not rich?" Marianne questioned, raising the fine, plucked line of beautifully groomed eyebrows.

"Oh, no—not now. But everyone likes them. Barbara is one of the most popular girls in town!"

"That's the neat little one?"

"No. That's Amy. She's terribly nice, too. She was in my grade all through school. She has a job in the Post Office, and Barbara teaches in the Montessori School."

The visitor smiled cryptically, narrowed her long, sloe-black eyes, and bit her brilliant, scarlet-dyed lower lip.

"And the young Greek god?"

"That's Barry du Spain. He *is* handsome, isn't he?" Inez agreed interestedly.

"Handsome! He's the most heavenly looking thing I ever laid my eyes upon. That ivory skin, and those eyes, and that mass of black hair. He looks like—well, who was it wrote 'The Raven'?—he looks like Poe," said Marianne Scott.

"But, remember, you said you were going after Link Mackenzie," Inez said, laughing.

"I said so, perhaps," admitted the other girl, "when we were just talking about these boys—before I came here. But I hadn't seen—what's his name?—du Spain, then. Mr Mackenzie, after all, is rather—isn't he?—*vin ordinaire?*"

Inez had studied French for some years, and she instantly recognized the last word. But the first rather puzzled her, and checked a reply.

"Mr Mackenzie is rich, is he?"

"Oh, yes. Besides the hardware business, his father practically owned the whole Westview Shores development, and they made a mint out of Las Haciendas. Link is with him, and the sister's husband, too, Otis Barnard. But they were rich anyway. They live—" Inez jerked her head backward, toward the dark window behind her—"they live right next door here, in an immense place—the mother's dead. There isn't a family thought more of here than they are," she ended, in a complicated phrase that was yet perfectly clear to her hearer.

"And this Barbara Atherton, I take it," Marianne summarized it, still smiling mysteriously into space, and biting her lower lip, "has both Mr Mackenzie and Mr du Spain on her string?"

"Well, in a way. Link likes her a lot; he has always been a sort of beau of hers. And Barry du Spain is a dreamy sort of poet, you know, he has no money—he just has an old ranch, down the coast, that his mother left him. But—for what it's worth, he is crazy about Barbara, too. Only in a sort of poetic, silly way," elucidated Inez. "He just about lives at the Athertons'; their father likes him because he's a bookworm."

"I could get him away from her like *that,*" Marianne said, smiling a faint, malicious smile, and snapping her slim fingers.

Inez's rather uninteresting eyes lighted suddenly.

"You cat!" she commented admiringly.

"Well, but I *could,* my dear," repeated the other girl seriously.

"Oh, I don't doubt it. And I'd like——" Inez admitted—"I'd like to see you do it. Only—only, if you're going after anyone, Marianne, why not Link Mackenzie? He's really worth while," she added, with a little giggle of excitement.

"I might take the Adonis first and wind up with the millionaire," Marianne suggested, with her confident laugh.

Inez laughed, too, but she was profoundly impressed. She had never, in all her twenty-four years as the daughter of one of the town's rich men, been able to take this magnificent attitude toward the attentions of

young men. Inez was haughty and vain in manner, but in her soul she was a timid wallflower of a girl who suffered agonies of apprehension before every picnic, and telephoned all the boys she dared, to arrange for dances, before she would go to a dance.

She had often thought of herself as taking love affairs carelessly for granted, as the Atherton girls did; of saying casually: "I've nothing but an extra, Ward," when men asked her to dance; of refusing invitations to ride or walk, rather than angling for them. But the proud moment had never come. Never until now, when she began to hope that vicariously, through her dashing cousin, Marianne, she might taste of this heady wine for the first time, and see the Athertons routed from their own field.

"I don't think you'd have much trouble," she said now. "She's an awful prude, you know—Barbara Atherton."

"Prude, is she?" echoed Marianne, with gleaming eyes.

"Well, yes. Their father won't let them go off on motor parties, and they wouldn't think of letting any boy kiss them!"

"Nonsense!" Marianne said incredulously, after a moment of staring. "All girls do, now."

"Well, Barbara doesn't. Amy isn't so bad. Frank told me so—said they were the straightest girls in town. He used to admire Barbara terribly, you know, before he was married."

"Your brother Frank? But he's years older than she," Marianne protested, finding the information distasteful.

"Oh, this was years ago, when she was about sixteen and Frank was about twenty-five. He likes her still, and so does his wife. He says she's the finest girl in Cottonwood."

"You mean that a professor's daughter, who hasn't a penny, refused your brother, who is one of the prominent men in town?" Marianne asked, arching her brows.

"I don't say she refused him—exactly. But I know that he had a terrible case on her—everyone knew that. You'll understand it when you know her better, Marianne. Barbara Atherton isn't a bit mercenary, really. She's—they're all different. They stay at home evenings and play writing games and poetry games with their father."

"Oh, good *Lord!*" Marianne ejaculated scornfully, amusedly. "It's about time someone came along and wakened you webfoots up," she added, laughing. "I don't see anything so remarkable about this Barbara Atherton. You and I'll get together, Inez, and give some parties, and we'll see what we can do!" she finished, on a significant note.

"I'd love it!" Inez consented, excited. "Mother would, too. You see, we've been very quiet since my father died."

"But, goodness gracious, didn't he die more than three years ago?"

"Ye—es," Inez admitted reluctantly. Her father's death had had nothing to do with her unpopularity, after all, but she hated to admit it, even to herself.

To have herself captured Link Mackenzie or Fatto Roach would have

been a wholly satisfying triumph. But, since there seemed no possibility of her doing either, it would surely be the next best thing to see her cousin snare these eligibles; to have them swarming about Marianne would mean that Inez came in for a sort of overflow popularity. Inez's somewhat expressionless face flushed and her eyes shone.

"You'd like to have me marry your friend Link some day, and settle down here for life, wouldn't you?" Marianne asked.

"It would be piles of fun! But I thought you were more taken with Barry?"

"Barry? He's the sheik. He's lovely," Marianne said, "but I don't imagine myself *marrying* him!"

Inez fell into a dream in which she, Inez, was given the sweet task of consoling Barry for Marianne's heartlessness. She heard herself saying: "Some day you'll care for someone else, Barry, and love will be all the deeper and truer because of this blow."

"What did you say?" she asked her cousin, rousing.

"Has this Barry du Spain any family?"

"None, only himself."

"And the other—the Mackenzie boy?"

"He has a father and a sister at home, and a married sister, Lucy Barnard. Marianne——?" Inez said, struck by a sudden thought, and stopped. "Marianne, if you really should fall in love with either of them, would you tell him?"

Marianne's expression clouded a little, and she flushed.

"Would I *what?*"

"Would you tell him? You know—about——"

"Oh!" said Marianne then, with a proud smile. "I might. And I might not! It would all depend upon how much—how much he cared for me!"

Inez said nothing. The surety of it, the insolent, easy assurance, quite took away her breath.

"Real men," said Marianne, "don't like stand-offish girls, and the proof of it is that the popular girls are the ones who are not—blue-nosed. This Mackenzie boy strikes me as just like all the rest, and—now that I come to think of it!—I'll bet he was talking about this very Atherton girl, when he said, tonight at dinner, that he thought there were lots of girls, nowadays, who were as particular as their mothers had been. He got quite red in the face about it. *I* said," Marianne went on, smiling mysteriously, "that I was afraid he was trying his arts on the wrong girl, because I didn't know *any* girl, in these days, who wouldn't let a boy kiss her if she liked him enough!"

She paused, thinking. Then she flung herself back in the pillows, yawning, and stretched a slim hand for her watch, on the little table beside her bed.

"Half-past one!" she said. "Good night, Inez. Ask Aunt Madge to let me sleep in the morning. I'm sunk. And don't worry about Mr Mackenzie; I've got *his* number. He'll not give me any trouble. *I'm* no prude!"

CHAPTER V

"Why is it," Barbara asked, in affectionate and indulgent reproach, "that you can be so charming on a little picnic like this, and when we have a big one, you can be so unspeakably difficult?"

Barry, sprawled comfortably at her feet, on the warm rocks, wound a fragrant bit of yerba buena about the shabby toe of her sturdy brown shoe. The little leaves stood up boldly and saucily, like a coronet.

"This isn't a picnic, Barberry Bush!" he protested lazily.

"Well, what do you call it, when you take your lunch out of doors?"

"I call it heaven, Barberry," Barry answered prettily.

"Yes, and it's lovely of you to say so. But why would it spoil it to have others—say Amy and Ward Duffy along?"

"I like Amy, and I like Ward Duffy, too—at least he isn't a gabbling fool like the rest of them," Barry conceded, "but they don't belong in my heaven, that's all!"

"And I do," Barbara added, unembarrassed. Barry would always pour out this sort of idealized love-making when they were alone together.

She liked it without taking it very seriously. It was only lately that she had been wondering if any real feeling lay back of it.

"I know you do!" he said. "Barberry, did you see that poem in the *Letter-Bag?*" he asked eagerly.

"No, but I have the magazine, right beside my bed. I'll read it tonight."

She was silent, and in the blue, still hour of the spring afternoon the only sounds they could hear were those of the sea and the wood. The sun shone warmly down upon them, and in their retreat under the young willows there was no wind.

A dozen feet from where they were established, the narrow stream known as Mission Creek widened to meet the ocean waters. To the south ran the long, lazy curves of the ocean shore, broken here and there by the roofs of old farmhouses, buried in plantations of eucalyptus and pepper and dismal cypress trees. The northern aspect was cut away by the cliff behind them.

Mission Creek, a coffee-colored torrent in winter, a thin, pooled thread of silver in summer, emerged from a tangle of mallows, willows, high cattailed grasses and tangled undergrowth, just below the bridge, a mile above. From that point it took on an ocean quality; there was white sand on its banks, where gulls swooped and peeped above the bewildered heads of grazing cattle, and the fresh, sparkling waters of the stream were met by a ruffle of gray salt water, surging to and fro with the shallow tides.

On this perfect afternoon, the tide was receding, in a series of wide, leisurely, frothy curves on the sands, and the gulls, enormous flocks of them, were walking with dainty little twisting motions on the wet strand that mirrored their gray and white bodies.

Barbara let her clear, child-like eyes follow the flight of one of them into the bright air. The bird hung motionless, high up in the blue, not a feather or a muscle stirring, yet with perfect balance and unchanged elevation exquisitely preserved.

"Funny how woodeny and clumsy they are on their feet, Barry. Their bodies have no more shape than the little cheap boats in the five-and-ten. Yet once they are on wings——!"

"Woodeny is a nice word," Barry commented dreamily.

"Do you wonder, Barry, that the old religious writers decided that we are all to have wings in heaven? Can you imagine anything more wonderful than lifting one's self straight up into the air, and drifting so, for hours at a time? Our wings, you know," Barbara said, with childish seriousness, "our wings would be at least fifteen feet long, Barry—they'd have to be. Those birds' wings are three times as long as their stiff little bodies are!"

"Do you s'pose you'll always believe in God, Babs?"

"I know in God," the girl corrected it quickly, with a little stress of the second word.

"You say that, my dear, and it's impressive. But nobody can *know.*"

"Oh, that's where I differ with you, Barry! You know, for example, that you like these days with me; nobody has to prove that to you."

"But I can see you, Barberry, and actually taste your stuffed eggs and chocolate cake!"

"Yes, and a good many people could see me, and even see stuffed eggs and chocolate cake, without considering that that made heaven."

"You know, some day you'll stop believing in God, with a bump, and then you'll see how you're deceiving yourself!"

Barbara's bright face clouded.

"Barry, I hate to have you talk that way!"

"But why? My God, Babs, there you go—like all the inquisitionists! I'm not to be allowed even to speak."

"Why do you say 'my God' if you believe there isn't any?"

"That's childish. But let's not quarrel," Barry pleaded charmingly, rolling over to plant his elbows in the sand under the willows, and resting his square chin on his hands. His face was flushed with the tonic of open air and sunshine; his rich dark hair was tumbled, and upon his beautiful mouth was his own impish, boyish, irresistible smile.

"Well, the fact remains," Barbara persisted, returning to her first point, "that I think Amy is beginning to resent my coming off with you on Saturdays."

"Jealous," grinned Barry, not sorry of it.

"But isn't it selfish of us?" the girl said. "When I have you this way to myself, you're perfectly charming, and we are laughing like a couple of kids all day. But the minute anyone else is around, you stiffen; you get sulky and silent and superior."

"You mean Link Mackenzie," Barry grumbled, sticking small clean

bits of dead willow twig into a little fence, along a smooth strip of san

"I mean all of them. Harry, Rita, Inez, Fatto—all of them."

"A lot they'd add to our picnics!" Barry scoffed. "Their idea of good time is to put a bottle up on a rock and shy stones at it, and then g over to the Casino and dance."

"They did that *once*—when the day turned out to be cold and foggy It isn't fair to judge them by that.—That's cute, Barry!" Barbara inte rupted herself to say, in a pleased tone, her interest in his little fence su denly awakened. She picked two smooth round pieces of wood, perha part of some old wheel-spoke, polished and shortened by the sea, fro the tidal, dry, clean rubbish about her, and set them on a jutting roc inside the fence, like microscopic cannon.

"Fortified," she said simply.

"I adore you!" said Barry, with a flash of real joy in his strangely e pressive eyes. "I adore our days together, our silliness—the day v cleaned the whole beach with rakes, and the day we had a select acaden for water-dogs! I hate their hot rooms and saxophones and perspiration

"But they think we're weak-minded," Barbara offered dubiously, b ing a long spear of grass.

"Well, we know we're not. We know we have more real fun in minute than they have in a year!"

"But you *see* the expression in Amy's eyes, when we tell them wh we've been doing," the girl argued, somewhat feebly.

"Amy's a sweet, dear child," Barry admitted loftily.

"Baby though she may be, she's exactly seven months younger th you are, mouthpiece of Allah!"

"But you," he said, "you're *rare*. I wish I never had to be with anyo else—ever."

Barbara dimpled, and flushed with sheer happiness. If this was r quite Link Mackenzie's manner of wooing, at least it was as close Barry would ever come to an expression of devotion. He was a faun Pan, wandering through the bewildering woods of life, and showi even at twenty-five, the courage and character to pick out what he want to revel in it, and to throw the rest aside.

Barry liked a woman for the qualities of her soul and mind. B berry mused, not only for the thrilling touch of her fingers or the s render of her lips.

Yet he was delightfully human, too, as witness the adventures w stuffed eggs and water-dogs. There was nothing unnatural, noth transcendental or affected about his hearty pleasure in the childish j of life.

That was it, really. Barry was a delicious, companionable, imagi tive, and most appreciative child. And love-making, according to the r standard, was anything but that!

She felt very close to her companion today; very safe and sisterly happy. It was restful to be with Barry; when they were alone together

nself was obviously and ecstatically happy and made few demands. at she should play with him, talk to him, and let him pour about her flood of his admiring devotion, was all that Barry asked.

After last night, with the searing memory of Link Mackenzie's sud- onslaught still fresh in her troubled and bewildered soul, it was thing to know that under no possible or imaginable stress of emotion ld Barry, or would Barry, similarly offend her.

Barry did not expect girls to kiss and cuddle and squeeze hands. His al of womanhood was a good deal higher than that!

Link—what had suddenly possessed sober old Link to scare her so! nk, passionate and critical and dissatisfied—it was funny.

Not so funny, however, but that Barbara's cheeks flushed at the mory of it. What had happened?

Resting on the dry leaves and shells and gathered seaweeds and grasses, r back braced against a group of young willows through whose April liage the sinking sun crept in greenish yellows and ethereal golden hts, Barbara reconstructed the whole episode.

They had been dancing, and Ward Duffy had offered her his coat, step out into Washington Street, and get a breath of cool air. No rm in that, surely? She had done it a thousand times before.

They had strolled into the little Park, Barbara's bare arms covered th Ward's warm, loose coat, her head bare, her face flushed and her ir a little disordered from dancing. And Link had suddenly developed s strange, new theories about girls—girls ought to like to be kissed, ls ought to permit familiarities, even if they didn't quite enjoy them.

Barbara's face burned again, remembering the suddenness with which is argument had developed; remembering his quick, hard arms about r, his breath against her forehead, his suddenly passionate, unsmiling es close to her own.

It had been ridiculous and undignified. If Link Mackenzie wanted sponse of that sort from the girl he liked, he would have to find some her girl!

"To wait until I'm married, or at least engaged, indeed," Barbara asoned, deep within her own soul, recalling all this in the clear, sensible ylight. "I don't believe I'd put up with it even if I were married! I n't believe one *has* to encourage that sort of thing, and pretend to like !"

"Why, my grandmother Atherton," she said, out of a silence, "lived enty-seven years with her husband, and she never called him anything t 'm'sieu'!"

"Didn't it beat everything," Barry asked dreamily, "the way they'd ve seventeen children by a man, and yet always speak of him—and to m—as 'Mr Smith'?"

Barbara's clear laughter rang out. This was so like Barry. To see the ean side, the funny side, the historically and dramatically interesting de.

"If you married me, Babs, would you always speak respectfully to me as 'Mr'—or better yet, as 'Señor du Spain'?"

"Why, I'd kneel down every time you addressed me and rub my forehead on the floor!"

A silence. Then Barry said:

"Wouldn't it be the authentic limit if we got married? We could, you know," he added eagerly, as the girl—yet not without a happy trembling at her heart—laughed carelessly. "We're of age. And I'm going to get a job, and I have the ranch, of course."

"Your job is going to be to write a play, little boy!"

"Well—all right." He considered it, his eyes brightening. "We could live on the ranch; there's an old house there."

"I've seen it."

"That's right, I forgot. You could keep house, and I could write a play!"

"Our eleven little girls and boys meanwhile frolicking along the beach and eating seaweed."

"Oh, Lord, no, there's eggs and sheep and milk and fruit! But we wouldn't have a lot of dirty little wet babies, Barberry, I loathe 'em!" Barry protested jealously.

"It wouldn't matter how you felt. I'd—" Barbara drew a long breath —"I'd adore them!" she said, with shining eyes on space.

"Honestly, I do hate kids," Barry assured her seriously.

"Honestly, I know you do, because you are such a bad, jealous, moody little kid yourself. But I'd spank you and put you in the corner with the rest of them," Barbara answered cheerfully.

"Would you like it, Babs?" the man asked affectionately. "I think I'd be awfully good, if I had you all to myself, all the time," he added, simply. "If Amy and Link and all the rest couldn't interfere, and you and I were just playing round together by ourselves. I'd be—" his voice thickened a little, and the black lashes misted with tears, like a child's thick lashes—"I'd be so damn' happy," he said, smiling.

"But, Barry—they'd think we were crazy, on no income at all!"

"We'd have an income. I rent the ranch to Portuguese, you know, and that more than pays taxes and insurance—or something like that!" Barry explained, his voice suddenly growing fretted and shrill, as one harassed beyond endurance by business responsibilities. "They pay me four hundred a year, and about two hundred of that's eaten up with expenses—and the last two years they've only paid part——"

"They cheat you. But I'd learn 'em!" Barbara laughed, with her brow faintly lined and her lip bitten, as he paused.

"Well, my grandfather, my mother's father, made a good living on that place!" the man agreed, looking at her with all a child's confidence and expectation.

"How big is it, Barry?"

"About two hundred acres. And the cattle's mine, too—only they get

the calves for taking care of the barns. And they're always killing some poor inoffensive old cow and eating her. They say she's broken her leg or been drowned in the marsh or something, but I notice it's never *their* calves or heifers that get hurt!"

"Would you let me run the place?" Babs asked, her fancy playing with the notion, as her slender, sun-browned fingers played with the dark hair at her knee.

"Let you run it? Why, I'd give it to you—out and out. You'd *have* to run it. I'd make you out a deed or something?"

"Poet farmers," Barbara smiled, musing.

"Arcadians," he substituted.

"Smocks and sunshine and grapes and candlelight. . ."

Her voice drifted into the dreamy blue silence. The afternoon was ending in soft glory; a golden haze had come up in the west, and the sea was veiled. But the air was still deliciously warm, and the shadows only softened. Quivering daffodil lights played among the young willows. And always their lazy talk had for its undertone the regular, thin crash of the shallow waves.

"Barberry!" Barry said, suddenly on his knees, his face alight. "Do you mean that we *might* do it? Are we really talking about something?"

His childish eagerness touched her, and she answered, with a new tenderness in her eyes:

"Dearest, there are so many things to think about, first!"

"No, but what—what?" he said. "What would we have to think about?"

"Everything, goose!"

"It would be such fun to give them all the go-by!" he said youthfully. "We'd take walks, and swim, and cook our meals together, and have the most wonderful times! You'd be Mrs Barry du Spain, and the children would be Eskimos! I'm Irish and Spanish, and you'd bring in England and New England!"

"Crazy talk, Barry!" She was on her feet, the basket caught up, and swinging from her hand. "Come on, it's after four, and I've got to get home!"

Crazy talk. But she liked it, none the less. It made her step joyously light and gay; it made her eyes dance with a strange happiness, as they walked the three miles home. That was the way a man and a woman ought to talk to each other, naturally and affectionately and simply, as children talk. There was nothing but danger and stupidity in all the rest, in this incessant feverish business of dancing and kissing.

Barbara put her limp, sweet, milk-scented buttercups, the first of the year, into the dishpan to soak, and went on into her bedroom, which smelled warm and close in the languid spring afternoon, to bathe and change. Her shoes were thick and stiff from salt water, and from the roadside dust that gathers in California even in mid-April. Her hair

was tangled from crawling through trees and brush, and her dress crumpled.

But the hot bath was deliciously refreshing, and after it Barbara tossed and brushed her copper hair vigorously, before slipping into the cool blue cotton that would do for cooking and for the home evening. And when she went into the kitchen, and found the last of the sweet spring daylight lingering there, and the buttercups stiff and varnished and fragrant in a pale-green and pale-gold mass, the joy of the long happy day still was with her.

Wonderful to tramp down to the beach and share lunch with a friend on the warm shingle of shore. Wonderful to come back to an orderly shaded kitchen, with angles of sunset lying in apricot color on the walls, and buttercups smiling at one from the shining white sink. Wonderful to feel running through her veins the relaxation that follows a gipsy day, to smell sweet soap on her hands, and the delicate scorch of hot irons on the fresh blue cotton.

No girl had ever in this world had a more loyal, devoted, jealous, precocious, boyish, amusing, and ridiculous friend than Barry. Fancy being able to go off with him from noon until four o'clock, for hours of intimate and affectionate conversation, without experiencing one moment of awkwardness or sentimentality or foolishness! Laughter, plans, good stimulating talk about books and social systems and religion; and now home, happily wearied and satisfied, with an armful of buttercups!

Mrs Barry du Spain. Barbara Atherton du Spain. It had a nice sound.

"But he'll never ask me to marry him," Babs decided maternally, setting a fourth place at the supper table in the sure conviction that he would join them. "At least, he'll never get any nearer to it than he did today. *I'll* have to tell *him* what we're going to do!"

And Barbara smiled contentedly, pleased that it should be that way. She filled a bowl with scarlet and black cherries—the cherries were early this year—and wished that she had taken a somewhat stronger stand with Link last night. She ought to have told him she would never speak to him again, instead of fighting like a silly high school girl, scolding and gasping, and then forgiving him meekly, and submitting to what really amounted to a scolding from him on the score of prudishness. Still, Link was an old, old friend, and one couldn't be angry with him long. It was foolish to expect him to be as fine and as sensitive as Barry.

CHAPTER VI

On saturday nights, Link usually dined at home with his father and his unmarried sister, Margaret, and wandered around to the Athertons at about half-past seven. Sometimes he brought Margaret with him, and perhaps Fatto Roach or Harry Poett, in which case they all played games around the dining-room table, if they felt like it, or went down to the

Washington Theatre, if there was a film or a play worth seeing. Films were twenty-five cents, and plays only twice that much, so that it never was a serious matter for anyone to buy seats. The Casino down near the beach, where there was a cover charge and a cabaret, and dancing on Saturday nights, was considered to be a treat for special occasions. Motor parties reserved tables there sometimes by telephone, and the town's fastest element, a group of divorced or childless married couples, were usually to be seen there once a week.

Barbara vaguely disliked and distrusted the Casino, as introducing an element into the quieter life of Cottonwood that was not characteristic of the town. Cottonwood folk were simple persons, and the parties at the Casino had the reputation of being wild parties, and often lasted until two or three o'clock on Sunday mornings. The Roaches and Poetts and Wilsons and Mackenzies did not often go to the Casino.

Link duly appeared, on this particular Saturday night, but he was almost an hour late. It was nearly nine o'clock when the lights of his roadster began to feel their way like flashing tentacles among the plastered walls and tiled low roofs of Las Haciendas.

The three Athertons, with Barry du Spain, were in the patio, for the April night was unseasonably warm, and there was an early moon. Scarcely had the opalescent glow of sunset faded behind the eucalyptus and poplar trees that stood between them and the west before the great red disk floated up lazily from the eastern horizon, flooding the little square backyards with uncertain silver, and transforming utilitarian garages and gates and chicken-runs into fairyland.

"We're out here, Link!" Barbara called when the door in the hall clicked; "aren't you rather late?"

Link sat down on the grass beside Barbara's chair.

"I can see that your father got on to the topic of free silver and gold, and McKinley and Bryan, at dinner tonight," the girl suggested whimsically.

"No, I didn't dine at home! Evening, Professor. Hello, Amy, is that you there in the dark? 'Lo, Barry."

"You didn't dine at home Saturday night? Why, Lincoln, are you off the track completely?"

"Well, I took Inez and her cousin—Marianne Scott—out for a drive this afternoon. Say—" said Link, slightly drawling the last word—"that girl is a high-roller, believe me. She's full of the Old Nick! First she wanted to stop at the Cemetery——"

"The Cemetery!"

"Yep. And we all got into spasms, laughing at the graves. We ought to go up there, sometimes, Barbara, you've no idea what crazy things some of those tombstones have on them!"

"I remember copying some once from an old cemetery in New England," Professor Atherton said, in a silence. Barbara had drawn back a little, in the mellow shadows of the plastered, tile-topped wall. She and

Amy did sometimes go out to the little cemetery, where the mother they had never known, and the granny who had been a mother to them, were asleep. Link's mother lay there, too. He had perhaps forgotten that; and she was grateful, as the conversation wandered amusedly among ridiculous epitaphs, that neither he nor her father had followed her line of thought.

"Then we went on to Soquel," Link resumed, happily unconscious of any lack of sympathy, "and Marianne—" it was Marianne already, Barbara noted—"Marianne wanted tamales and tortillas—she'd never tasted them. So we went into a little joint there, one of these awful places with a spotty tablecloth and bottles of catsup, and we all had tamales. By that time, it was almost six, so I telephoned my sister I wouldn't be home, and we all fooled up and down the street, and went to a fortune teller—I never laughed so much in my life!"

There was amused and interested comment from the others in the group, but Barbara was silent. She did not like Link in this mood of hilarity; it did not, somehow, sound quite genuine. However jolly and spontaneous the afternoon's merry-making had been, it had been the sort of foolishness that belongs strictly to the moment; it could not be preserved or quoted or shared. Only a stupid person could possibly attempt to convey its giddy charm to others, and Barbara irritably felt that Link was stupid in thinking he could do so. Evidently he had had such a merry time that he had lost all his usual quiet good sense.

"How did you happen to start on this mad carouse, Link?"

"Inez telephoned, just before I left the office—three o'clock, I guess—and asked me if I didn't want to come over for some tennis. But when I got there they didn't have a fourth, and—I don't know—somebody suggested that we go around in the car and take a look at the town."

"And she's attractive, is she, Miss Scott?"

"Well, she's lot of fun. She plunges right into everything, doesn't care what anybody thinks of her or how many are looking on. But, say, Barbara, I came to get you. We're going down to the Casino."

"To the Casino? What's happening tonight?"

"Nothing special. But they always have cabaret there Saturday nights, you know."

"But, Link, it's so late now, it's after nine."

"Well, that's all right. They're going on ahead, Inez and Marianne and Harry Poett, and maybe some other fellow, if they can get one, and you and I are to join them."

"Oh, but you don't need me, Link. I'm not dressed——"

Amy and her father instantly joined him in trying to persuade her to go. She'd have a lovely time, and they didn't have to make it late unless they felt like it, and she could slip into her blue in five minutes. Amy went so far as to extend a slim foot, in the dark, and press it significantly against her sister's foot. And Barbara perfectly interpreted the message:

"Don't let her think she can have it all her own way with Link Mackenzie!"

Only Barry was ominously and sulkily silent.

"We need another man," Link remembered suddenly, "come along, why don't you, Barry?"

"Oh, thank you, Link." It was Barry's coldest, ugliest voice. "You're awfully kind. But I don't feel like it."

Barbara added her pleading. Even though Barry would probably spoil the party, where Barry was, Barbara Atherton had a single-eyed, single-minded, single-hearted slave. Let Marianne Scott, who had thought Barry so handsome, who had made unmistakable overtures to him at the dance last night, thoroughly understand that.

But Barry wouldn't go, and about half an hour later, Barbara, still feeling that this hysterical rushing about so late at night was extremely silly, and still disturbed by Link's elation and excitement over his experience of the afternoon, duly climbed into the roadster beside him and was duly escorted to the Casino, down on the shore.

The great place, pagoda-shaped, looking almost like some fanciful great junk, moored at the edge of the moonlit sea, was gushing raw light into the soft spring night. Jangling scraps of discordant music drifted out upon the air, and the entrance, like an old-fashioned drawbridge, brilliantly illumined, and lined with cotton palms in pots, was surrounded by the dark, shining oblongs of parked cars.

Inez Wilson had been able to get a desirable table, close to the dancing, of course. Nothing in Cottonwood was ever refused to a Wilson of the Wilson Fruit Bank. She and Harry Poett, Marianne, and Fox Madison had just seated themselves, when Barbara and Link, threading the already well-filled tables, and trying to seem quite unconscious of interested glances from all sides, joined them.

Inez was looking and acting her worst, sallow in the new shade of sickly sea green, noisy, laughing, and flirtatious. But Marianne was the most striking woman in the room.

She was a little older than the other girls, twenty-five or six, with a perfectly colorless ivory skin, black eyes, a thin and sinuous body, and long white hands. Tonight she was wrapped, rather than dressed, in a brocade garment of dull red and blue and gold and silver, her sleek black hair, straight and bobbed short, almost concealed by a tightly wound turban of gold gauze and pearls, and her full, rather sensuous mouth brilliant with Japanese rouge.

Fox Madison, a florid, thin, eyeglassed Englishman of perhaps forty years, was laughing at her with that sort of proprietary pride that a man of the world feels in any clever and beautiful woman. Harry Poett, a nice-looking, simple boy, was apparently captivated, too.

"Oh, here's Miss Atherton—how d'ye do?" Marianne interrupted her giddy rush of chatter to say with a composed upward sweep of her black eyes. "Link didn't think you'd come—and I knew you would, and I was

right, wasn't I? He said you mightn't want to interrupt that game of Parchesi."

Barbara, inclined to be good-humored, laughed with the rest.

"We didn't happen to be playing," she admitted. "We were all out in the backyard."

"The——? Oh, the backyard. I see," Marianne repeated it carefully. And suddenly it sounded rusticated, to sit. in. one's backyard—even to mention a backyard.

"This is a wild spree for me, Fox," Barbara said to the man on her left; "after last night, to come to a party again tonight."

"Last night?" Marianne asked, arching her plucked black brows.

"Last night there was a dance, too, you know. We were all up until after midnight," Barbara reminded her, smiling at Harry Poett, in greeting.

"After midnight! Oh, excuse me, but that's delicious!" Marianne repeated, bursting into soft laughter. "Why, when I was in New York, a few weeks ago, we often danced all night," she told them, "and then stopped in Brumayer's for coffee—that's the thing to do this winter—and went to bed in the daylight. Inez, do tell me, must I be tucked up in bed at ten o'clock every night all the while I'm in Cottonwood?" she demanded whimsically.

But dance music, beginning with the squawk of saxophones, interrupted her. The instruments, played by Negroes in white frogged coats, in a sort of balcony in a corner of the room, rose instantly to such brazen clamor that conversation became impossible. Link, with a nod for Marianne, rose to his feet, Harry claimed Inez, and Barbara was left with Fox Madison, who detested dancing.

No use to try to talk seriously, against the noise. Barbara sat with her elbows on the table, her linked hands lying before her, and smiled amiably at Fox, when he shouted an occasional comment. Chicken sandwiches and ginger ale all round, she supposed? Fox nodded, and the waiter wrote the order and vanished.

She knew strangely few of the dancers; they were mostly visitors, casual passers-by, who had stopped their cars for dinner at the Casino. "Sporty-looking," Barbara characterized them. Women underdressed, with painted cheeks and eyelids and lips and finger nails. Little dangling dresses all beads or sequins, bobbed heads tightly curled and brightly colored. They talked to their men while they pressed still more scarlet paint upon their lips, between dances.

The evening, as far as Barbara was concerned, was a failure. Link danced with her, Harry danced with her, and both told her that she was a far better dancer than Marianne was. But Marianne was the success of the hour; no use denying it, one might as well face it.

Harry and Fox both had flat silver flasks, and Marianne toned her ginger ale with Scotch, and so did Inez. The latter was either actually affected by the unusual stimulant to become sillier than ever, or pre-

tended she was. Presently a head waiter bent over Link, who was host at the party, and murmured that he would serve some real vintage champagne if Mr Mackenzie liked.

Mr Mackenzie, whom Barbara decided she had never seen to so little advantage, gave a flushed and excited assent. He wanted Barbara to drink to Marianne's happy stay in Cottonwood, with the others; but she declined, and the golden bubbles were spilled by the persistent waiter against her arresting hand.

"It's all so silly—so utterly and idiotically *silly!*" she said to herself, trying to smile naturally and indulgently, trying to stay with them, to be a good sport.

The clock on the wall said ten minutes to twelve, the band banged and throbbed like some hammering nerve in one's head, the air grew thick with dust and cigar and cigarette smoke, and the meaty fumes of food. Women laughed hysterically, made plunging movements across the tables, screaming, reaching for glasses, and were quieted by their embarrassed friends.

All the lights went out, except for a bright pool in the center of the empty dancing floor. Into this a slim girl with big rings on first and fourth fingers, and an Egyptian headdress and belt, wriggled and squirmed her way. Her body was bare, except that her breasts were covered with plates of brilliants, and a fringed belt was loose on her hips. She worked her rings like the eyes of moving serpents.

"These people would think the Indian corn dance barbaric," Barbara mused scornfully, watching and applauding with the rest. She thought of the shingle down near the creek, of afternoon light through the young, green-yellow of the willows, of the clean sea water meeting the clear creek water, on the sandy, shellstrewn beach.

One o'clock. She was past scorn now; she was weary and sleepy to the point of agony. The open-air picnic, after the late hours last night, the six-mile walk, and these dragging hours of heat and noise and close air, made her feel utterly broken. Barbara could have laid her copper head upon the littered table and slept where she sat. And still the saxophones blared and throbbed and the Negro boys broke out into hoarse, vocal accompaniment.

Link was paying the check; sixty-two dollars. It was outrageous to tip the waiter, and tip the head-waiter, and pay sixty-two dollars besides for this preposterous, dull evening!

However, one couldn't say anything about it. Especially she, Barbara, couldn't. She had probably betrayed her bored and disapproving attitude quite plainly enough, without verbal underscoring.

Cold, delicious sea air rushed at them when they went down to the thinned line of waiting cars. Harry could take two in his car; Barbara and Fox squeezed in beside him. Link took the other girls home, Marianne cuddling up against his shoulder with a little trill of still fresh and untired laughter.

"Do you hear what she said, Barbara?" Link called, laughing, amused and shocked, as the two cars started.

"Who said?" Barbara called back.

"Marianne. She said she was running off with your beau!"

"She's the limit!" Harry Poett said, with an appreciative chuckle. "Bold as brass."

"She's extraordinarily lovely to look at," Fox added, scratching a match as they swept out into the dark street.

Barbara said nothing.

She felt dreamy, tired, and oddly quiet, all the next day. Outwardly, it was just like all their other Sundays. But inwardly, Barbara felt old and wise.

Link's sister Margaret telephoned her at about noon. Link wanted to know if Barbara could come over to dinner at one o'clock. Afterward, they were all going somewhere.

Where? Margaret didn't know. She was quite a little girl, not more than seventeen, and she was evidently being teased as she telephoned.

"Ouch—stop!" she was giggling. She was in such a gale of laughter that she could hardly speak.

"Will you—they're all making such a racket! Will you, Barbara? Inez and Marianne are here already—they're going to play tennis."

"Where are they going afterward, do you know?"

"No-o-o-o! Oh, *ouch*—Barbara wants to know where we are going afterward—stop that!"

Barbara's voice had sympathetic, mirthful notes in it, but she felt a little hurt.

"Is Link there?"

"He's just gone downstairs."

"Well, I don't see how I can come, Margaret. We haven't had dinner yet, and Mrs Godley hasn't come. Amy and I were just getting things started, and I can't very well walk out and leave everything to her!"

Margaret protested only perfunctorily. Was it youthful gaucherie, or had she gathered, from the attitude of the others, that they were not especially anxious for Barbara's company?

"Oh, go!" Amy urged her regretfully, when she went slowly back to the kitchen.

"I don't care anything about it," Barbara assured her, a little heavily. She was experiencing a queer, numb emotion, not at all like anger or jealousy.

Dinner. Let's see—what were we having? Green peas that had been shelled yesterday, and that rapped like tiny bullets when they were poured into the white saucepan. Barbara put a lump of butter into them, and a wet lettuce leaf over them, and covered them snugly as she lighted the light under them.

Peas, and asparagus salad, and brown muffins, and cherry tart. The

girl began to mix her batter easily and comfortably; she had been able to make muffins for Granny before she was twelve. She buttered the little pans with a brush.

"Amy, if you mix what was left of the French dressing with what was left of the Thousand Island, there'll be enough, and it might be kind of nice and light, with asparagus."

"For the love of Allah, make enough muffins, Babs," Barry said. "Six is just silly!"

"When I made six, Barry, I had no idea that you were going to come back from the ranch on the same day you bid us a tearful farewell and said you were going down there to live in holy seclusion until your book was written."

"All right—all right! That was last week. Why haul it up now?"

"I haul it up?" Barbara repeated, with indignant emphasis on the pronoun. "You started it!"

"I love asparagus," Amy said childishly, sucking her finger.

"I hope—" said Professor Atherton's bland voice—"I hope I am duly grateful to my Maker for one such day as this! The sun shining, my two girls laughing together as they prepare a meal, the fat of the land about to be placed upon my simple table——"

"Hire a hall, darling!" Amy suggested, kissing him.

"Do you include me in your thanksgiving?" Barry, sitting flat on the floor before the oven, charged with the browning of the muffins, asked happily. So seated, with his hair tossed as usual, and his loose white shirt, he looked no more than the handsome, impudent, confident child he loved to be.

"Of course I do, Barry, my boy."

"Barbara wouldn't go over to the Mackenzies'," Amy volunteered, "because Mrs. Godley didn't come to get dinner. They're going somewhere afterward, too, aren't they, Babs?"

"They may be." Barbara slipped a plate to heat for the muffins between the pot of peas and their cover. "But I don't want to go racing off all over the country in the traffic of Sunday afternoon," she objected. "It seems to me crazy. A dance Friday night, the Casino last night, and now they all jam into the car and go off again."

Her own voice sounded convincing, even to her. But the wretched little sense of being excluded, of being hurt, persisted. What were they all doing in the big Mackenzie house, where Norah was serving the fried chicken and Tilly was taking a last glance at the freezer of ice cream? Were they really having fun? Barbara would be welcome enough, of course, if she went, even now. But did they really want her?

The peas, the asparagus salad, the cherry tart seemed suddenly flat. There was a tameness in the usually pleasant process of moving a table into the patio, and propping the fourth leg with the blade of a knife, on the uneven bricks. The breakfast ingle in the kitchen was always too hot at noon, in spring. It faced southwest, and summer lunches and

many summer suppers were eaten in the blue eucalyptus shadows under the protection of the plastered, tile-topped wall.

"After lunch let's make exactly four sandwiches," said Barry, when the meal was almost over, "no more, now, I loathe those shoe boxes full of mushy stuff that you have to bring home to save! Four sandwiches, and four chocolate bars. Have we any chocolate bars, by the way?"

"We have those Sanito-nervo-tonico-bites," Amy said, weakening with sudden disrespectful laughter.

"Well, they're all right, if they *are* digestible. Have we four?"

"Four? You forget that Dad sent five dollars! We have crates of them. They came yesterday."

"All right. Four sandwiches, four Sanito-nervo-tonico-bites," Barry resumed, "and the drinking cup. This is the day we're going to walk out the old mesa trail, have a drink at the pool above the trough, supper up there, and coast down this side of the mountain home."

"Oh, say—I feel like doing that today!" Amy agreed enthusiastically. "Old shoes, small hats, sweaters——"

"Amy," Barbara said, suddenly taking part in the conversation, "why don't you telephone and ask Ward Duffy to go? He's lonely; he doesn't have much fun!"

Amy hesitated, her color changing, her eyes bright.

"Oh, I don't like to. But I'd love to."

"Five sandwiches, five Sanito-nervo-tonico-bites," Barry altered it droningly, as Amy flew to the telephone.

"Cheer up. You'll have a nice time," he pleaded rather than stated in an undertone to Barbara.

Carrying the empty salad platter, he was following her into the kitchen with his hands full of plates. The girl gave him a shamed and grateful glance.

"I know I will! I always do."

"You wouldn't want to be skidding all over the place in that roadster, Babs?" the man, capably rinsing his plates before piling them neatly in the sink, asked anxiously and simply.

"No-o. I don't really like that sort of thing." She fell silent, arresting him with a touch of fingers on his cuff, her troubled eyes averted. "But —if they are going to do it," she stammered presently, trying to make her thought clear, "if we *are* to have parties every day, and excitement—if *someone* is to be popular and in constant demand——"

"I know," Barry murmured as she paused, distressed eyes on her face. "How long is that Marianne girl—that Scott, going to be here?" he asked.

"Oh, *she* doesn't matter!" Barbara said hastily.

"I think she does. I think she despises us all here and that she's just going to kick holes in us—if she can," Barry answered with unexpected feeling.

A combination of pride and shame suddenly braced Barbara. The

usurper had been only forty-eight hours in town, and here was she, Barbara Atherton, meekly laying down her arms without a struggle.

"I don't know," she said briskly and sensibly, pouring heavy cream from a small fat bottle into a small fat pitcher. "But I'm extremely silly to let it make me feel cross. They asked me to go and I said I didn't want to go—I'd much rather be with my own crowd. They'll probably make a fuss about Marianne Scott for a few weeks, and then forget her, or at least she'll settle down like the rest of us. Perhaps she'll marry Fox."

"Has she money?" Barry asked, with simplicity.

"Well, some, I imagine."

"She'll go after Link," the boy predicted. And all Barbara's unworthy fears were set suddenly fluttering again. Would she really? Would Marianne Scott become mistress of the big house under the big trees? Well, what of it, if she did? Barbara surely didn't want Link Mackenzie—Barbara surely didn't want Link Mackenzie. . . .

"I'm never with you, Barbara, but what I want to kiss you," he had said. A pulse hammered in her throat, today, remembering clumsy, quiet Link saying that, although she had felt quite composed and cool at the time. And for the first time in her twenty-two years, Barbara Atherton felt a little shaken—a little confused—over the thought of a man.

CHAPTER VII

The disquieting thought returned more than once, during the long afternoon, when she and Amy and Barry and quiet young Dr Ward Duffy were walking; it returned often in the days that followed. Spring came to all the ranches lying on the low hills all about Cottonwood in a flood of fruit blossoms, and even in the woods, where so many trees—oak, redwood, manzanita, eucalyptus—did not lose their leaves in autumn, there was a beautiful fresh thickening of foliage everywhere, and madrone trees and wild lilacs and willows put on fresh and delicate green. The redwoods wore tiny, furry tips of blue-green, spread like fingers at the ends of their wide, flat branches; the buck-eye trees, the western chestnuts, were plumed with fragrant spikes of creamy-white bloom. And all over the hillsides, against the darker woods, the wild lilac blossomed in rifts of pale, smoky blue.

Barbara Atherton, teaching in the soft, lazy mornings, watching the children as they shrieked and ran in the school yard at eleven, and walking slowly home through familiar, quiet streets at half-past one to the house that Mrs. Godley always had in perfect order long before that time, wondered, sometimes, what life had been like to her, without the disturbing element of Marianne Scott.

She saw Marianne frequently, and when she did not see her, she managed always to have an idea of what Marianne was doing. The other girl's mere existence fretted her; everything she heard about Marianne

seemed unduly important, seemed significant, almost menacing, in Barbara's own scheme.

Fox Madison, for example, the florid, big, good-natured Englishman who had been a figure in the town for twenty years, had already nicknamed her, "Helen of Troy." Helen of Troy! What was the quality in a girl, what peculiar charm must she have, when a man, after a few weeks' acquaintance, could name her so?

Fatto Roach, a tall, thin young man who had hitherto paid small attention to girls, also seemed to be strangely attracted to Marianne. Inez Wilson's house, an enormous, ugly wooden place, with mill-work decorating its turrets and bay windows, in a very jungle of garden shrubs and trees, and begonias blooming in a little conservatory off the dining room, became, for the first time in its forty years, now that Marianne was in it, quite a meeting place for the younger crowd.

There was tennis there on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and there were boys and girls spending the evening there almost every night. Twice, in her first month in Cottonwood, Marianne and Inez and Link Mackenzie, with his married sister Lucy Barnard for chaperon, went off for the whole week-end to Del Monte, and to San Francisco. At Del Monte they played golf and watched the polo and dined at Pebble Beach; and in San Francisco they shopped and went to the theater. On the first occasion, Barbara was asked.

"But I don't see how you could possibly jam Lucy and Marianne and Inez and me into your roadster?" she had objected.

"Oh, we're borrowing my father's car. Seven passenger."

"Well, I'll ask Dad." And Barbara, without feeling much heart in the project, had indeed asked her father.

"Driving to Del Monte Saturday, eh? And coming back Sunday night after dinner? Whose guest would you be, Babs?"

"Well—Lucy's, I guess. Lucy and Otis Barnard are chaperoning."

"Lucy—" the professor had reminded her, looking over his glasses in a way that generally signified disapproval—"Lucy didn't ask you?"

"No, Link asked me. It's the way they do things, now, making plans all in a rush, without stopping to think much of the details. Marianne just suggests something, and in two seconds they're all talking about it. Lucy *would* have asked me, I suppose, if she had been there."

"Oh, Lucy wasn't there?"

"No, but Link was going on to talk to her, when he brought me home."

"Well," the Professor had said finally, returning to his paper, "I'd rather you didn't go. I don't care much about these week-end parties of young persons in hotels. At the same time, if you very much want to go, I shan't stop you. Only, there's a big expense to it. When the National Entomological Society held its convention in San Francisco, rooms at the good hotels were five and seven dollars a day; everything's expensive—

you'd find precious little left out of twenty dollars, after such a week-end. However, you use your own judgment."

Barbara had hesitated, undecided, in spite of Amy's vigorous nod, from behind their father's head, and Amy's mouth rounded to form the word, "Go!"

"You'll have piles of fun!" Amy had urged later. But Barbara had decided not to go, after all. She knew, by this time, that wherever Marianne Scott was, she would not have piles of fun.

Marianne, who seemed to men the jolliest and most original of companions, was instantly recognized by every woman with whom she came in contact as a person who did not play fair. Her game was always for herself against all comers, and to win a laugh from the company, or to impress a man with her own attractiveness, there was no friendship Marianne would not sacrifice and no sensitive heart she would not wound.

Her art in drawing the interest of the group to herself, her skill in making herself seem fascinating, were helped by a sense of absolute self-confidence, of native power. And power she really did have: the strange quality of always being able to make what happened to Marianne Scott seem the important and enviable thing.

One afternoon in early June, when she had been four or five weeks in Cottonwood, Barbara and Barry du Spain were in the group that gathered on the lawn at the Wilsons' house, to watch the tennis. The ugly big house was behind them; before them was the lovely stretch of the grass, the court, with its protecting nets etched by the delicate fingers of banksia climbing roses, and the background of stable yard and trees.

Men's doubles were being played; little red-headed Jim Bonner and Otis Barnard were partners against Link and Harry Poett. Inez and Fox Madison, who played well, had been beaten a few minutes earlier by Joe Dodge and Link's little sister Margaret; Marianne, Barry, and Barbara were sitting with them now, watching the second contest, laughing, gossiping, and generally enjoying the bland decline of the perfect summer afternoon.

Inez had never had such a summer, had never dreamed that she could have such a glorious time. The advent of her fascinating cousin had brought into her life all the thrilling elements hitherto denied her; had made her a participant in joys upon which she had before this only been an onlooker.

To have men telephoning to the house at all hours, trying to make engagements, planning the most delightful parties—to have the choicest group of Cottonwood's young persons saying carelessly, "Meet you at Wilsons'," was intoxicating to Inez. She had never had a real admirer in her life, for all her wealth and position; and despite her carefully selected, expensive hats and beautiful little frocks, she had never seemed to possess any attractions for men.

But now all this was changed. Helen of Troy, lazy, audacious, confi-

dent of her power, had come to stay at "Pampas Park," as Inez's mid-Victorian grandfather and grandmother had seen fit to name their pretentious home; and where Marianne was, all the world flocked.

To be sure, the delicious cup was not without its bitterness. Mamma complained of the constant, demoralizing hospitality, the midnight suppers and unexpected guests, and the cook, Hatty White, who was afraid of nobody, had taken lately to the undesirable habit of expressing her opinion of the changed state of affairs, from the kitchen, in a voice quite loud enough to be heard in the dining room, as more than one guest's heightened color and sudden nervousness had recently testified.

But these were trifles. Today, sunk in a basket chair, with her sallow face flushed from her tennis game, and her costume quite the prettiest in the crowd, Inez felt happy to the silly point, and babbled and chattered and giggled her worst.

Barbara was sitting on the ground, with her back braced against Inez's chair. Pulled down over her soft coppery hair was a small white hat, her white dress, opened at the throat with a turned-back collar, was as plain, as short, as modern as a dress could be. Yet somehow the costume suggested the difference, the little-girl simpleness and straight-forwardness, that marked Barbara apart from the other girls of the group. Her eyes were thoughtful today, as she chewed on a long ribbon of young grass, her cheeks flushed, and the line of her young mouth unusually firm and serious.

Marianne, in a near-by wicker chair, was wrapped in a thin garment of bright scarlet silk, flowered with great orange and black and yellow poppies. Upon the sleek black cap of her hair a wide red hat was tipped at a daring angle, and drawn down almost to her strange dark eyes; her bare arms were ringed with bracelets, and heavy earrings drew down the lobes of her ears. Her mouth drooped with the weight of scarlet paint.

Half-smiling, she kept an eye on Inez. Now and then, turning her gaze full upon Fox Madison, she murmured a few syllables to him. Barbara, watching her without seeming to watch her, wondered what the words were that they should hold Fox silent and content, at her knee, all afternoon long.

Cottonwood had always seemed a rather dull little place before Marianne's advent. The girls there had bemoaned the lack of interesting men; especially when Link Mackenzie and Joe Dodge were away at college, and Ward Duffy taking post-graduate medical work in Europe. Little Jim Bonner, who stuttered, and Fox Madison, who was almost middle-aged, and Barry du Spain, who was as queer as Dick's hatband—well, these were all males to be sure. But the Cottonwood girls did not consider them exactly exciting material, and "hen parties," despised by all healthy young womanhood, had been somewhat the order of the day at this time last year.

However, now Joe and Link were home, and when it was merely a

question of balancing sexes, the other youths were well enough to fill in with—anyway, the effect of the Wilsons' lawn this afternoon was gratifying. Four stalwart men playing tennis, and, with the girls on the grass, almost as many more unmarried attractive males as audience.

And Barbara loved it; she loved afternoon gatherings, and all the laughter and flirting and chatter that accompanied them.

Only there was always that sinister slim figure between her and the full light of living, nowadays. Marianne Scott, with her sophisticated ideals, and her reckless tongue, and her insolent, confident eyes. Helen of Troy!

Beyond the tennis court, and the Wilsons' old stables and table orchard, she could see the upper windows and sloping roof of the Mackenzie house through the trees. If Marianne really married Link, she would be mistress there—she would be the first lady of Cottonwood.

"Well, if that's what's going to happen," Barbara thought, "I wish it would happen and be done with!"

"Barbara," said Marianne, out of a silence that was underscored rather than broken by Inez's senseless babble.

Barbara looked up expectantly, and Barry, beside her, turned at the name and looked up, too.

"What have you done to the poet laureate to make him see nobody else in the world but you?" Marianne asked idly.

Barbara laughed.

"I feed him, for one thing. He likes my corn bread."

"Ah, well," Marianne said resignedly, "I can't compete there. You domestic treasures, you have a woman like me, every time!"

"How do you like being discussed before your face this way, Barry?" Barbara asked him.

"I don't mind it." He spoke briefly, with distaste. He would not rise to the nonsense, to the easy levity of the hour. Barry, who could be as giddy as a happy child in the Atherton kitchen, was resentful and unresponsive and deliberately uncomprehending here. Barbara could gladly have slapped Marianne for the amused and indulgent glance the older girl sent toward him.

"Why don't you clap our aces? You clap theirs!" Joe Dodge shouted from the courts. The girls began dutifully to applaud.

"Score, Link?" Marianne called. She already had everyone's given name comfortably at command; Barbara did not know whether to resent or to laugh at her enthusiastic greetings when, after a few hours', or at most a few days', separation she met "dear old Fox," or "adorable Fatto," or "that fascinating Harry person," at a dance or movie. Marianne always had the air of being among intimate old friends, always had something important for the ear of Link alone—something that had to be whispered to Harry or Joe.

"The games are three-two," Link called back, making a ball run up his racket, between games, and crossing the court.

The sun shone down upon them placidly; the longest day of the year was close upon them now, and at four o'clock there was no sense of lessening light. Deep sweet shadows lay on the lawn, the shade was permeated strangely with brightness and glowed as if it might diffuse a radiance of its own.

"What a day!" Barbara said, to say something. The strangely troubling effect of this girl was to make Barbara afraid of silence. What did Marianne think they were all thinking, in silences?

"Divine," Marianne agreed easily. "I hope the Hamiltons have such weather!"

"The Hamiltons?"

"Carter Hamilton, the novelist, and his wife. She and I are old friends. They're motoring up to San Francisco from Los Angeles, and they'll stop here with my aunt, overnight."

"Well, what if they do?" that restless, unsatisfied inner tribunal of Barbara's asked fiercely. But outwardly she made merely a commonplace comment. They must be interesting persons. Oh, Marianne said, they were. She wanted Barbara to meet them.

Later, when the game was over, and Link had thrown himself down beside Marianne, Barbara, apparently deep in cheerful conversation with Ward and Fox, could catch occasional phrases: "It made me proud . . . I'm always proud when my friends do anything well, even if it's only a game of tennis. . . ."

And still later, when Barbara and almost all the others were going away, Marianne managed to walk with Barry down to the gate. They were behind the group, Marianne quite deliberately loitering, Barry detained, perhaps against his will, by her slow step, her upward glances, her full stops in the flower-framed old path.

When he and Barbara were alone, walking home between the quiet old homes, asleep behind their trees and shrubs and fences, Barry said viciously that he loathed that sort of girl.

"But she seemed to like you, Barry."

"Like me! That was all for Link's benefit," Barry growled. Barbara, who had been oddly soothed by his irritation, did not like this point of view so well.

"Do you suppose she's really after Link Mackenzie?"

"Of course she is. Isn't he the richest man in town?"

"Is he so fearfully rich, Barry?"

"Well, he will be when the old man dies, I guess."

They walked on slowly, around the Roaches' corner, in a long slant across the Poetts' side yard, through the Duffy place. It was the same old familiar scene: upper windows opened on this warm evening, gracious pear trees and sycamore branches moving gently in the sunset air. Judge Cobb's chauffeur was cleaning the car, with a great swishing and spouting of water, and the Bonner children were having their supper on the side porch.

With a whole square block in the nicest neighborhood of all for its own, with the biggest of trees and the handsomest of old brick fences, with awnings and a pergola, and trimmed shrubs throwing clean long shadows across the brick walls, and with the sinking sun setting the famous maples literally on fire, she came to "Major Mackenzie's place."

It had been called "The Laurels" once, years and years ago. But although the double line of tall, glossy-leaved trees grew bigger and handsomer every year, the name they had given it had fallen into disuse, and it was proudly pointed out to visitors as "Major Mackenzie's place" now. Mackenzie owned the one big hardware store, and was interested besides in real estate; Mackenzie was on the School Board and the Board of Health, and he had been Mayor three times.

Across the side street, facing the south front of his property, was the pretty, modern home of his older daughter, Lucy, who was Mrs Otis Barnard now. Lucy had a fat baby daughter of two, named Margaret for her sister and her mother, and every woman in town had known every amazing detail of Lucy Mackenzie's wedding outfit, and of the marvelous layette she had prepared for the baby. Old Major Tom Mackenzie went across the road every evening at about five o'clock to see his granddaughter get her bath and her supper, and be laid, cool and sweet and powdered and tiny, in her white crib, with her big white bear.

And Cottonwood, knowing this, knew that old Major Tom would like to see his son married, too; like to see Link's children running about the place, some day. If Link and Inez had fancied each other, he would have been well pleased, because Inez would have plenty of money some day, and he had known and liked her father. But if the boy preferred some other girl—that red-headed Atherton girl, for example, well—Major Mackenzie had known that family all his life, too, and her grandmother, old Mrs Bush, had been a fine old lady.

Barbara, as she and Barry walked past the Mackenzie place tonight, found herself wondering what old Major Tom would think of Marianne, and felt a sudden pang of homesickness for the old days and the old ways that seemed to be so peculiarly threatened; that seemed already gone into the past. What simple, happy times they all had had, only a few weeks ago, without any particular consciousness of being grown-up men and women, with the great problem of life decisions to face!

If Link really were going to fall in love with Marianne, and if they were going to have all the fuss of announcing an engagement, and making plans for so important a wedding, then Barbara wished, with an angry sort of ache in her heart, that she might be miles away; that at least she need not hear all about it, be bored and satiated with it.

"All the way to San Juan, for a Spanish dinner, and then dancing practically all night—I'd like to know what they get out of it," Barry said scornfully.

"Who's going to do that?"

"They are, they say. Thursday night. It sounds perfectly crazy, to me."

"Barry, do you think she's pretty?"

"Marianne Scott?"

"Yes." But she was sorry that he had known the pronoun could mean no one else.

"Sure she's pretty. She's more than pretty. She's kind of fascinating, like a tiger."

Barbara, all the way home, did not speak again.

But she thought a good deal. She told herself that Marianne wasn't anything more than an unusually pretty and poised and self-confident girl. She found these adjectives slowly, conscious for the first time in her life that she herself was neither poised nor self-confident. Marianne was not Cleopatra, Marianne was not Helen of Troy, Barbara mused; this attitude of uneasiness and fear and curiosity was ridiculous.

"I'm not afraid of her!" she said. "There's nothing superhuman about her!"

And yet there was something unnatural, something stronger than herself, in the uncomfortable attraction that drew Barbara over and over again, against her will, into Marianne's neighborhood; that invested everything the other girl said and did with a strange and troubling fascination. Almost every day Barbara found some excuse to drift in upon Inez and Marianne, for talk, for luncheon or tea, for tennis or bridge.

If it were morning, she was apt to find them still in bed, or at least wandering about in pajamas or Japanese coats, through the big ugly rooms of the upper floor. Marianne might be treating her satin black hair to a shampoo, or a vigorous brushing; she might be at the mirror, eyeing herself critically as she applied pastes and powders and tints; she might be stretched comfortably in bed, with her breakfast tray hardly disturbed, and set aside on a chair, and the sheets of the morning paper opened in her hands.

"Barbara, come in here!" she would call. And Barbara, feeling more than ordinarily respectable and middle-class and conventional and dull would obey, seating herself on the foot of Marianne's bed, and giving the older girl the laughing yet guarded confidences that her innate fear of Marianne dictated.

"Don't tell me that you've been up since six, and fed chickens, and frosted cakes, and had a bath and made your bed, already," Marianne might protest, moving her feet, under the light covering, to accommodate her caller, and linking her fingers behind her head with the same gesture that sent the paper to the floor. Her tone would make the feeding of chickens and frosting of cakes and making of beds consummately absurd.

"But, Barbara," Marianne would go on whimsically, "you're young, you're pretty—why do you *do* these things?"

"Well, I like to, for one thing."

"Like to? Nonsense! No girl likes to. I never frosted a cake or fed a chicken in my life. I used to make my bed sometimes at boarding school,

when I couldn't get some other girl to do it for me. No, girls like to be out dancing all night, and to sleep until noon . . ."

And Marianne would buff the flaming tips of her fingers lazily, and begin to discuss her plans for the day. To Barbara's secret surprise, she had not only made herself a sort of special guest among the conservative old homes of Cottonwood, but her mere presence among them seemed to be a spur to all the first families, to the Bonners and Dodges and Mackenzie's and Wilson's and Poetts, to entertain most unwontedly.

Barbara had known Link Mackenzie and Rita Roach and Fatto all her life, but she had never been asked to dine at their houses. The older group in Cottonwood had hitherto done little to entertain the younger crowd; boys dined in their own homes, and girls at their fathers' elbows, and if the youngsters met later at a dance or movie they considered themselves quite fortunate enough.

But now the Wilsons' girl guest was being made the object of a number of small but none the less important affairs. Inez was also asked, perforce, as Marianne's hostess, but Barbara was not. Barbara had shared many a picnic lunch with Link and Margaret and Lucy Mackenzie; she had often had tea or ginger ale on their lawn, and sometimes, before Lucy's marriage, she had come home for a Saturday luncheon with Lucy. But that was as far as it had gone with Barbara. Now it was for Marianne, a newcomer, to ask her innocently if she did not think old Major Mackenzie charming at the head of his own dinner table, and to comment upon the Bonners' cook and the Poetts' table service.

Of course, with Inez, there were two girls for whom hostesses must find dinner partners, in every case—not too easy a thing to do in Cottonwood. To ask Barbara Atherton meant that a third man must be invited, and that, with the family included, made a pretty big table.

So Barbara got her accounts of these affairs secondhand, and bore herself with what gallantry she could command. To buffet suppers and card parties and small dances she was of course bidden, and on these occasions she always made herself look as pretty as she could, and danced with all the boys impartially: with Fatto and Joe, Harry and Ward and Fox and Link.

CHAPTER VIII

One august day, in the long vacation, when she and Amy had walked back from the bathing beach, where all Cottonwood's younger crowd had gathered for a dip, and were lunching in the kitchen, Amy told her that Marianne had refused to marry Fox Madison.

Barbara stood perfectly still at the sink. Fox was a joke; no self-respecting girl in her twenties would want to marry this florid, unambitious idler past forty. Yet . . .

Yet, without anyone suspecting how he felt, quietly and unostenta-

tiously, on one of these summer days, he had actually asked her. Who else had asked her? Who else was going to ask her?

"How do you know, Amy?"

"He told Ward Duffy, and Ward told me."

"And she refused him?"

"Oh, of course! She's waiting for Link. It makes me sick to have her get him," Amy said carelessly.

"She has lots of attractive points, Amy."

"Oh, she's fascinating, of course—she gets them all. Except Ward—except Ward—except Ward!" Amy did not say the last words aloud, she merely sang them in her heart. But their truth was the secret of her indifference to Marianne's charm.

"I guess she'll get Link," Barbara observed, hoping to be contradicted.

"Oh, he's crazy about her now; anyone can see it," Amy answered. Barbara told herself that Amy knew nothing about the matter. Link was constantly in Marianne's company, and that, in Cottonwood, was quite enough to start the rumor.

"We used to have such fun at our old Sunday night suppers," Barbara mused. Paper napkins, sandwiches, chocolate, and Barbara's famous ice-box cake, eight or ten guests scattered about the little patio, and afterward a walk if the evening were warm, and games in the kitchen if it were chilly. Delicious, noisy silly games, with the girls' faces getting flushed and their hair tumbling, weak gasping of laughter, feeble and tearful screams of mirth. "I wish we could have one of those evenings again," the girl thought wistfully.

Would Marianne think it silly, sandwiches and cocoa and games? Marianne would plunge into the cheapest coffee van, or the dirtiest tamale parlor, and find them great fun. But would she make the Athertons' kitchen and paper napkins and the little patio seem ridiculous? Barbara knew she might.

And not for the first time, nor the tenth, Barbara only waited until the heat of the day somewhat lessened, with the coming of the late afternoon, to walk up to the Wilsons' and find out for herself what they were all doing. She despised herself for going, but she could not keep away.

A tall, slim girl, with her bright hair almost hidden under her small white hat, she strolled slowly toward the aristocratic portion of the town where the Mackenzies and Wilsons lived, and as she went she felt a sort of sickness in her soul.

Anything would have been better, more dignified than this—to hang about where one was not wanted.

But then she *was* wanted; they always welcomed her most enthusiastically when she came in.

Only this was different from the old feeling, the careless, cheerful impulse to go where one wished to go, and say and do what one wished. Marianne's coming had seemed to intensify everything—to make them all self-conscious and strange with one another.

Families were driving about through the wide, shady streets, in little motor cars, as families always did on pleasant summer afternoons. Mother and father with the baby on the front seat; Grandma and the older children in the back. Barbara smiled and nodded; many of these youngsters were, or had been, her pupils.

She felt within her a deep, restless discontent with life. Why couldn't she be happy with a new book; with her father's always interesting conversation; with the beach and the patio and the sweetness of the August day; with the contemplation of Amy's quiet affair with Ward Duffy, and with Barry's unswerving, if fantastic, fidelity to herself? Why didn't the mere prospect of a free afternoon, of figs for supper, of a swim before breakfast tomorrow, mean anything to her any more?

Nobody was at the Wilsons' house; the maid thought they were all over at Mr Mackenzie's. Barbara walked the long block, under the big trees, and between the old-fashioned gardens where flowers made swimming blots of color in the afternoon sun.

Inez, Marianne, Link, Margaret, and Harry Poett were in the dark, handsome library, among the musty shadows and the odorous leather bindings; they said it was cooler in here than anywhere out of doors. Barbara protested that it was not so hot, now. She, Amy, and Ward were going to walk down for a swim, before supper.

The library faced north, across the rose garden, where level shafts of sinking light shone like gold gauze, and bees shot to and fro. The flowers stood erect, mesmerized into motionless sleep, enveloped in strange bright luminescence.

Beyond the rose garden was the grape arbor; thick dusty clusters of fragrant Isabella grapes showed between the folds of the cotton leaves, dry tendrils curled about them. And still beyond was the high evergreen hedge that shut off the side road: a hedge so old that it wore barren patches, where the yellowed pattern of the branches was bare, and whose thicker, brownish-green parts were etched with dusty cobwebs, spread to the last delicate filament on the dark background.

To the west, whence streamed the banners of gold and red, lay the dignified wide leisurely stable yards and poultry runs, fences and windmill and pump, paddock and cow barns. There were fruit trees here, peach, pear, and apricot, and spreading high above the new brick garage a towering fig tree, whose green-black fruit strewed the bare ground beneath. Major Mackenzie's old roan looked mildly over a barred gate, now and then stretching a wrinkled kid nose toward the flowers of the hollyhock hedge, just out of reach, whinnying softly. A faucet, dripping under a heavily leaved and heavily flowered fuchsia bush, had made a pool where wary little brown birds were drinking and pluming themselves. The fuchsia flowers were royal purple, and pale clear pink, fringed and tasseled like court ladies.

Nothing sensational going on in the library, nothing to see in the side

garden. Yet Barbara sensed change, sensed import under the smooth-running surface of the commonplace scene.

Marianne, always the center of every group, was extended comfortably on a *chaise longue*, her slim legs and crossed ankles in full view, a cigarette in her fingers, her lazy, mischievous glance moving from one face to another in turn. She spoke little, and Barbara noted that Link, sunk into a wicker chair near by, spoke less. Harry was teasing young Margaret, and Inez was making her usual unfortunate effort to lend sprightliness to the conversation.

Link was charming in his own home, and Barbara found herself realizing, as if for the first time, that this splendid place, this big brick mansion, with its shuttered bay windows and big curved central stairway, would be his some day; barns and stables, flowers and arbors, fruit trees and idling horses.

Link's wife, whoever she might be, would be mistress here. What a rôle for a girl to fill! What a sunny life with this man for a companion, and this friendly town for a background!

Link asked her to help him, when refreshments were in order, and Barbara went with him into the clean, big pantry that smelled of scrubbed wood and cheese and apples, and they got out bottles of ginger ale, glasses, and cheese crackers, together.

The maids were out, it being Thursday afternoon; Barbara saw a supper of cold meat, salad, and cake neatly arranged for Margaret's convenience in the ice box. Sunshine slanted redly across the orderly, spacious kitchen, checked glass-towels were hanging neatly on hinged poles, two moss roses were in a glass on the spotless sink. Outside the screen door, watching them wistfully, lay Link's big Airedale.

"Hello, Gob!" Link greeted him. His voice seemed to Barbara oddly quiet and heavy, somehow. The dog's tail beat an instant response upon the porch floor, and his eyes blinked, but he did not stir otherwise.

"He knows you are not going to let him in, the old darling!" Barbara said affectionately.

"He knows he can't come into the kitchen," Link assented absently.

She gave a last glance at the tray, picked a bottle-opener from the hook where bottle-openers always hung waiting, and twirled it on her finger.

"'Member one night in this kitchen, years ago, when we were kids, Link, when your Aunt Lily was here, and we had a candy pull?"

"*Do* I?"

He put the tray down, and Barbara felt herself amazed and a little frightened when she felt his big hands firmly holding her shoulders, and saw the expression on the face so near her own.

"Do you remember the night last spring, when you wouldn't let me kiss you, Babs?" he asked, in an odd tone, and with a strange smile.

"I remember the night you mean—yes."

"I wish—" Link said—"I wish you had let me!"

The pain in his voice and in his eyes puzzled Barbara and made her heart ache vaguely.

"Why?" she whispered.

"I don't know. But I wish you had. Everything was so simple, then." Link paused. "Marianne says you like Barry du Spain. Is that true, Barbara?" he added suddenly.

"Not—not that way. At least, I don't think so." The girl spoke confusedly, breathlessly, in a low tone.

"You don't think so?" he echoed, smiling bitterly. "My dear, when it's that—you won't think anything, you'll *know.*" And he jerked his head in the direction of the library. Tone and expression, when he spoke again, were full of significance. "Would you be sorry?" he asked.

It had come. It had come. No more uneasy speculation and vague jealousy and restless analysis now.

The world plunged, for Barbara, resettled on its axis, but never to be the same. The impossible had happened, the unbearable must be borne.

"You *are* sorry?" Link rather accused her than asked her, reading her look.

"Oh, no—I'm glad, of course!" she faltered bravely.

He dropped his hands from her shoulders and walked to the window, and she followed him there. They stood together, looking out unseeing at the dooryard, and the laden gooseberry and currant bushes, and the rinsed milk bottles, neatly inverted on a vine-wrapped picket fence.

"I've got it awfully hard!" Link said presently, with a gruff, embarrassed boyish laugh.

The girl sent him a quick oblique glance, looked out of the window again.

"I know you have!" she said quickly, in a low voice, her face reddening.

"She likes you a lot, Barberry Bush," the man said awkwardly.

"I'm glad!" Her tone was quite lifeless; she felt oddly numb. What was the secret—why was she out of all this? Why hadn't he—why hadn't he made *her* understand? Why wasn't it of Barbara Atherton that he was telling some other girl this?

Jealousy caught her in sharp teeth and shook her. It was all for Marianne—all for Marianne! It wasn't fair.

Gooseberry bushes in the Mackenzie side garden, powdered with some white powder; a green painted trellis behind them, covered as closely and evenly as wall paper with the clean leaves and heavy white rosettes of the Lamarque rose.

"I guess it's the first time, with me," Link was saying, in a happily shamed and shaken voice he tried to make laughing. "She's *got* me—I love her so! I want her so."

"Good luck to you, dear," Barbara said solemnly. And as she raised her innocent, troubled face, and her luminous eyes to his, he stooped quite simply and kissed her.

"Well!" ejaculated Harry Poett from the hall doorway, in joyous appreciation. "Really, Link—really, Barbara——"

"Oh, you shut up and mind your own business!" Barbara could say good-naturedly, instantly armed, and twirling her bottle-opener again, as she preceded the two boys to the library. "Don't worry about Link and me!"

Marianne, raising a brown slim arm from which the flowered soft sleeve fluttered like a great wing, reached for another cigarette and regarded them with narrowed, brilliant eyes.

"Link, give an account of yourself," she commanded lazily.

Barbara saw Link's answering glance, she saw his big hands tremble as he opened and poured the drinks. Marianne's power over him seemed to radiate from her like a visible aura; she had only to speak and her accents dominated the room; even when she lay still, sipping her ginger ale, and watching them all with her bright, quick eyes, they were all conscious supremely and primarily of her.

When Link crossed the side garden in the summer evenings and went up the Wilsons' drive, Barbara wondered, when he took Marianne for walks under the big, moon-washed trees and loitered with her by a paddock gate, or when they two murmured and murmured on the side porch, deep into the night, did Marianne let him kiss her?

Barbara had not wanted him to kiss her, just a few months ago. He had told her she was stand-offish and cold. Was Marianne stand-offish and cold?

"People cure themselves of the drink habit and of the drug habit," Barbara told herself sternly, walking home alone to join Amy and Barry and Ward for a late dip in the sea. "And I'll cure myself of this. I'll not think about them—I'll not care what happens to Marianne, or how much she gets out of life! I have plenty without them—they really matter to me no more than if they were European royalty. I'll be nice, I'll be friendly and interested, but I'll build my life without them. I must, unless I want to suffer frightfully in the next year or two. They'll have announcement parties, and she'll have the handsomest trousseau ever seen in Cottonwood, and the biggest wedding, and she'll be mistress of that place . . .

"She'll be mistress of that place. And I daresay she'll have a beautiful baby immediately, to show exactly how easy everything is for her. . . .

"I mustn't think this way, and I mustn't care. Now! It's over, and I'm going on my way serenely, to find my own place in the sun. Marianne Scott may be the most fascinating and irresistible woman alive, but she can't marry more than one person, after all. . . .

"Link. He simply worships her. Trembling and red and shaken like a boy in his first love affair . . .

"But I mustn't think about that. I'm not going there any more, I'm out of it, and it isn't my fault, that's just life. Some persons have things, and some persons haven't, and that's the end of it."

It was hard to say; it was almost impossible to attempt. But Barbara had at least cleared the situation in her own mind by facing it heroically, and she armed herself to accept it heroically over and over again.

The commonplaces—the uninterestingness of life overcame her like a flood. The very muscles of her hands and feet seemed to rebel at the eternal setting of tables, the washing of dishes, the patient, merry directions to the little stumbling children of the kindergarten. Life, for the first time, had mysteriously lost its flavor.

If before this she had analyzed the situation at all, it would have been to think that the pleasant days would go on in the same fashion forever; work, laughter, home duties, sodas at Bartell's, dances at the Hall, and summer swims on the Casino Beach. And, presently, weddings for everyone.

But already there was a change. Already she was looking back at last winter, at last summer, as strangely happy times—gone forever. Some subtle, intangible agency had altered all the old relationships, had made all the careless, casual meetings between Cottonwood's girls and boys self-conscious and significant.

Link Mackenzie and Marianne didn't come to dances any more; there were not many dances, anyway. And somehow the life seemed to be taken out of any event at the Hall, for Barbara at least, when she knew that Link didn't care about it, preferred to be somewhere else. All the town knew, now, that Link was in love with Marianne Scott and that his father was furious about it.

Amy was absorbed in a quiet yet deep affair with young Ward Duffy. Margaret Mackenzie had been sent East to boarding school. Inez Wilson had gone into professional invalidism and had vague and mysterious disorders, and trained nurses.Inez always looked cheerful and was beautifully dressed, in bed, but she would speak of nothing but blood pressure and aneurisms.

Link's sister, young Mrs "Ote" Barnard, appeared abstracted and anxious, when Barbara occasionally encountered her; Barbara was obliged to believe that either they had all been a crazy lot of irresponsible kids, a year ago, unaware of the real seriousness of life, or that this particular gloomy, foggy autumn was really duller and less eventful than any season Cottonwood had ever known.

In November there was rain, and heavy, milky fogs poured in from the ocean, and the smoke from damp leaf fires wrapped the town in pearly winding sheets. The air was still, cool, lifeless; clear yellow leaves still hung on the apple trees, and cosmos floated like little pale discs of pink and white on the bushy, delicate green of their thready, cloudlike foliage. In the shabby gardens of Cottonwood, heavy-headed chrysanthemums, beaded thick with water, hung motionless, and from the red hips of the rose trees spiders stretched great wheels of pale silver, jeweled with cloudy opals.

The sounds of clucking chickens, fish horns, boat whistles out on the

coast, came dreamily through the still mornings. Barbara sometimes felt as if she were asleep, wondered vaguely what had metamorphosed her life so suddenly.

When Amy went off with Ward for supper in his mother's old mansarded boarding house, near State Street, or when Ward took Amy to the movies, Barbara and Barry and Professor Atherton got supper together, and afterward Barry was companionable and amusing. He was quite devoid of social sense; Link Mackenzie and Lucy and Marianne meant no more to him than did any other persons in town; Barry was delighted that Barbara was seeing nothing of them this winter, and quite content with vegetable suppers, and pencil games afterward, in the Atherton house. And Barbara loved him for it.

One night, when Professor Atherton had gone early to bed, and when they were waiting in the pleasant warmth and brightness of the kitchen for Ward to bring Amy home, Barry began idly to discuss the future.

"It's a definite thing between Ward and Amy, isn't it?"

"Oh, I think so. She won't admit it, but Ward's got a chance in Los Angeles, and Amy keeps talking as if she expected to go south."

"Your father'll go with them, won't he? He says he has to be there anyway, for some lectures."

"I suppose so. We haven't talked about it yet."

"Would you go, Barberry Bush?" He was suddenly rather flushed, and his eyes shone. The girl laughed at her own confusion in not seeing what excited him.

"I don't think so. I like my job. And Dad would be back in a few weeks. We might rent this place."

She was sitting opposite him, in the little breakfast ingle, the table between them. They had been exulting over a magazine, just arrived, in which two of Barry's poems had been given prominent place. It was far more amazing to Barbara than to him that almost everything he wrote was accepted, even though the pay of small magazines for short poems was never more than twenty-five dollars, and often five or ten. Barry took it coolly, but to Barbara it already spelled success.

Now she saw that he was smiling at her, foolishly and happily, and without knowing why, she smiled back. Her beautiful sunburned hand was lying palm upward on the table, and he dropped his own big firm hand upon it.

"Ever think about marrying me?" he asked, grinning, breathless, with a boy's daring laugh. Barbara laughed, too, jerking her hand away and turning red.

"I haven't happened to!"

There was a pause.

"Why not?" the man asked, suddenly earnest.

Another silence, although Barbara, with her head dropped on one side, looked at him deprecatingly; opened her mouth to speak, decided not to,

and looked at him amusedly and reproachfully instead. She again essayed words, and no words came.

"Joke, huh?" he asked.

"No, Barry darling," she soothed him hastily, putting her hand back into his, and dropping her tone to one of affectionate protest. "Only—only you sounded so serious!" she said.

"Well, I was!" Barry answered.

Suddenly, as the strange silence again deepened between them, and Barbara continued to regard him with half-amused and half-frightened eyes, he got up and came around the table, and sat down next to her. Holding her chin back like that of an unfriendly child, and laughing a little, she felt herself caught tight against his breast, and as she buried her face in his shoulder, the better to protect it, felt his kisses on her hair.

"I love you, Barberry Bush!" he said. "I love you terribly!"

She could not repulse him; it was so wonderful to be loved, to feel this big firm arm about her, to laugh excitedly into the shining eyes so close to her own.

"Barry, this is crazy!"

"Then let's *be* crazy!"

And they both laughed joyously, as if it were a joke.

Perhaps it was, perhaps no sensible girl would have gotten satisfaction out of the passionate devotion of Barry du Spain. But the memory of that happy, silly half-hour in the kitchen, when they had talked all sorts of absurdities, and when his eyes had looked eagerness and joy and devotion into hers, was one of Barbara's joys in the days that followed.

Amy was busy with her own affair, Professor Atherton was not very well and was glad to spend most of the cold, foggy season in bed. No one was paying any particular attention to Barbara and Barry; for two or three days the thrilling secret was their own, making all the commonplaces of the girl's quiet life secretly thrilling and significant.

Barry wrote her exquisite poems and little love notes. Barbara would quite shamelessly catch up a volume of Shelley or Browning, and flash along the pages until she found just the right line or phrase with which to impress him, when she penciled little requests or replies. Whenever they were alone, he put his arms about her and kissed her forehead, or the top of her shining coppery head, or her brown, shapely, slim hands.

It was like a masquerade to both. To Barbara there was great satisfaction and happiness in making him happy, in raising his mood to absolute ecstasy, as she talked of their married-life-to-be on the old ranch, and of the days of fame and fortune to come. It gratified her deeply to see her power over him, his agonies when she was critical, his delight when harmony reigned between them.

This went on for a week, perhaps, and then, on one particularly depressing morning, he found her at home, putting the pantry in order. Her father was not well, and Amy and Ward had decided upon a quiet

wedding, early in the year, and would drive south to their new home for their honeymoon. Barbara admitted to herself she was unreasonable, but she could not banish from her heart a sense of being slighted, of being left behind by the current of events. She found herself looking at unmarried women curiously; Miss Porcher at the school, Miss Bates at the Library, both happy and busy and satisfactory human beings. But—but how the years flew by, between twenty and thirty, and how odd it would be some day to know one's self to be finally grown beyond all the silly irrational planning for honeymoons and bungalows and budgets!

It was in this mood that Barry found her, putting the pantry in order, undecided and troubled about Amy's plans, her father's plans, her own plans. The patio was full of fog, the air was chilly in the pantry, and scented with ammonia and wet wood.

They talked for a few minutes, the man eagerly, the girl hesitatingly, her eyes lowered, a smile tugging at the corners of her mouth. After that, she ran upstairs to take a peep at her sleeping father and hastily change her clothes. She came down with her new blue coat buttoned snugly about her and a blue hat pulled down over her sunny hair. They were both laughing like mischievous children as Barbara, putting her hand in Barry's, walked beside him to the City Hall. Young Mr Hutchinson, the new assistant rector at St Rita's, married them just as the noon whistles were droning over Cottonwood.

Barbara Atherton watched the clergyman seriously, saw vaguely that there was the photograph of a pretty woman on his desk, and a pen tray of hand-painted china. Beyond his study window was a cold garden, drooping in the fog. The chrysanthemums wore shriveled leaves of black, close to their white, sharply scented blooms.

Married. Married. They were getting married. The room was warmed upon this damp, inclement morning by a blue enameled oil stove; it sent a ring of soft light into the air, as well as a column of warmth. Married. She would be Barbara du Spain.

"Anyway, he's the closest boy friend I ever had," she thought, glancing at Barry's serious, handsome face. "Anyway, other girls get married, and it all comes out happily enough. Anyway, if he is a little bit spoiled, I'll be so good to him, and make him so happy, that he'll change. Anyway, I won't be an old maid."

It was over. "Kiss her," said the clergyman, smiling, to Barry. The housemaid and Mrs Pheland, for the Reverend Mr Hutchinson boarded with Mrs Pheland, appeared fluttered as they affixed their signatures, but Barbara wrote her new name with great composure. Barbara Atherton du Spain.

Barry, grinning boyishly, kissed her boyishly, too. It was the first time he had kissed her on the mouth.

CHAPTER IX

By two o'clock, the town had the news, and the Athertons' telephone bell was in a constant titter. Was it true that Barbara and Barry du Spain had run away that morning and been married by Mr Hutchinson at St Rita's? Presently all the other telephone bells were ringing, spreading the tidings in small-town fashion, and women everywhere asked each other what on earth the young couple thought they were going to live on—young du Spain's poetry, maybe?

"If Marianne Scott hadn't come along when she did, Barb'ry Atherton might have had Link Mackenzie," the gossips assured one another. And many were the errands made that afternoon in the neighborhood of the Atherton house.

But Barbara did not care what they said or what they thought. She and Barry were going down to the hacienda on the coast, for a few days, and meanwhile she was laughing like a madwoman, as she kissed her father and Amy, more full of excitement and high spirits and nonsense than they had seen her for a long time.

The plan had been to start for the ranch at about two, but it was after three o'clock when they piled Barbara's hastily packed suitcases and the box of food that Amy had insisted upon providing into a station motor car, small, muddy, and rattling, and started on their short honeymoon trip.

"Take your time," Barry said to the driver, "the roads are bad. It's only twelve miles, but you can't make it much under an hour!"

"I don't care how long we take," Barbara assured him comfortably. She was laughing; it was all exciting and dramatic and strange. Barry sat with her in the back seat, an arm tight about her shoulders. He grinned at her in friendly fashion, and she smiled radiantly back.

"Like being married to me?"

"I think—" she said superbly—"it's grand!"

"Gee, I'll bet the whole town's buzzing!" Barry said boyishly, with relish.

"Can't you *hear* them?"

A jolt of the car sent her in helpless laughter against his big, sustaining shoulder. They straightened themselves only to be violently unseated once more.

"Deetour," the driver said bitterly and laconically, wrenching at his steering wheel. And it took no more than this to convulse his passengers with agonized and stifled mirth.

"Barberry Bush, darned if this isn't the smartest thing we ever did!"

"*I* think it is," she said contentedly.

Hers was the attitude of the generous mother pleasing a happy and

expectant child, and Barry clung to her hand, exactly like that satisfied child, saying little, utterly at peace.

When they left the town behind them, they could see the wet fog, like a pulsing blanket, rising and sinking over the flat-lands between the dirt road and the sea. The sky was leaden and low, and beads of moisture formed and reformed on the windshield glass. Sometimes they passed a shore farm whose weather-beaten roof looked deserted and shabby under the vague, funereal plumes of the fog-shrouded eucalyptus; sometimes, toward the west, they could hear the steady beat and fall of the sea on invisible rocks.

The car rattled and joggled on ruts, and the driver whistled softly the eternal "Turkey in the Straw."

"Tooty-toot-toot-toot, tooty-toot-toot-toot . . ."

"Let's hope we get there in daylight, Barry," the girl said, peering out at the brown meadows, the brown wayside weeds, the worn old brown "shake" fences. "For we'll have to do some airing and cleaning, I should imagine. How long ago did the Portuguese get out?"

"They didn't live in the old house, anyway, they lived in a bunch of cabins, down near the barns."

Barbara laughed excitedly.

"We'll have quite an estate!"

"Lord, I'd like to get there—it may all be in a terrible mess," Barry presently said, with some misgivings.

"Oh, we'll fix it up!" the girl responded confidently. But as the bumping and halting, rattling and shaking went on, she grew stiff and chilly and weary, and in her heart echoed his wish that this journey might end.

It ended too soon, however, in mishap, half a mile from the ranch gates. Fisher, after a dispassionate and almost silent examination of the broken spring, turned up his collar and started philosophically upon the long walk to Turner, the nearest village, and Barbara and Barry picked up their bags and boxes and turned their faces the other way.

The old ranchhouse looked peculiarly deserted and forlorn, as they wearily approached it, just as darkness fell. It was wrapped mysteriously and somberly in fog, its old plaster walls were discolored and dirty, and the great kitchen, into which Barry's keys admitted them, was almost devoid of furniture, and smelled only of dampness, mice, and decay. There was a great open fireplace opposite the door, flanked by a large rusty range, but Barbara's first discouraged glances persuaded her that they could make no refuge here, at least tonight, and after a short consultation, during which they sat uncomfortably on the edges of their inverted suitcases, they determined to try the cabins.

In the dirty, dark little huddle of dwellings where the recently departed Portuguese families had been housed there was not much immediate promise. But there were iron pots, and an open fireplace, and in the early darkness Barbara's first care was to get a fire going and to find a broken chair upon which she could lay her coat and hat.

Her hands by this time were not only cold but cracked and grimy; she slipped out of her dress and put on a kitchen gingham, and forced herself, in weariness, darkness, and cold, to gather what conveniences she might into the room.

Barry made trips between the cabin and the old hacienda, bringing a kerosene lamp, and managing to find oil for it; bringing blankets and chairs, a mattress, plates and spoons.

"By the Lord Harry, they gutted the place!" he said, in disgust. "They must have gotten into the house. When I was last down here, just before they all got out, the Lord knows it was dirty and upset enough. But this is the limit!"

Barbara, as the heartening warmth slowly began to penetrate the dark little peasant interior of the cabin, laughed at his dirty face; felt a lock of loosened hair slipping across her forehead and put up a dirty hand to fasten it in place.

"Well, it was a crazy thing to do," she said, "but we'll get out of it all right! Tomorrow we'll open up the big house and air it."

The heating air was penetrated by an odor of stale grease and ashes. Amy's sandwiches and jar of jam and tin of instant coffee, opened in this strange, miserable scene, looked oddly prim and clean.

"My room was locked over at the other place," Barry explained, "so these blankets at least are mine. And there's a big pantry there outside the kitchen, with salt and flour and so on in it; they didn't get into that. But they didn't leave much else!"

"Oh, let's eat!" Barbara said, on a long, exhausted yawn. "Oh, Barry," she added hopelessly, "you'll have to go back to the big house and see if there is any sugar—we can't take this coffee absolutely straight."

He departed again obediently, and the girl sat inert and idle, her back humped, her grimed hands motionless, her weary eyes only half open. Red lights and shadows moved about the dirty room, and outside the fog gathered and deepened noiselessly, and the sea fell in even crashes, down on the rocks.

Barry's shoes, as he brought in the rough logs, had left deep muddy tracks on the dark, greasy floor; the logs themselves had shed lichen and bark—no matter. The fireplace was banked with feathery ashes on whose fringes cigarette butts still lay unconsumed. Never mind, tomorrow they could make everything ship-shape. And nobody need ever know—nobody need ever know—about tonight.

"I wonder if I was a fool to do this?" Barbara said, half aloud.

In another moment Barry was back, letting in a cold shaft of foggy air as he opened the door, and causing the lamplight to swoop up in a black-red gust. Barbara got stiffly to her feet; he had brought sugar, thank goodness, and a can of milk.

"Different times, when I'd come down, I'd buy stuff at the grocery," he explained, "and there's quite a collection of cans there. But we can manage all that tomorrow."

He had opened the door into the adjoining room, where the mattress and the blankets had been spread, that some of the warmth from the kitchen might penetrate it. There was no light in that room; Barbara felt that perhaps it would be as well not to carry even a candle in there tonight. The place smelled dirty. All very well to make a joke of these things, years from now, when Barry was recognized as a great poet, but in all the confusion and exhaustion of the present moment, since they could do nothing to make it more habitable, they might much more wisely spare themselves further shocks.

Yawning, she poured the coffee. Later, perhaps, she thought, she might heat a pot of water, and try to clean her black hands and face. But food was the important thing at present.

"It's only ten minutes of six," she announced in amazement, pushing her cuff aside with her chin, to avoid touching it with her grimed fingers, and glancing at her wrist watch before the apron sleeve had time to slip back again. "It feels to me like midnight!—— What's that?"

For there was a timid knock at the door. Barbara's eyes widened in quick fright, but Barry only laughed.

He crossed the kitchen and peered through the door he partly opened. A pale, rather sickly looking man of perhaps forty, shabby and bareheaded, stood there smiling.

"Good evenin', mate," said the caller hesitatingly. "Didn't want to scare you or the *frau,* and thought I'd better come over and say howdy."

Barry glanced over his shoulder at Barbara, who was poised beside the table, expectantly watching, and with the lamplight glowing on her lovely face.

"Come in," he said.

"My name's Slinder," the man said frankly, "Hilary Slinder."

"My name's Du Spain," Barry answered, in his friendly simple way, "and this is Miss—Mrs du Spain."

"Let's shut this door," Slinder said companionably, doing so. "Mate," he went on, to Barry, "before you you see a funny man. A man that life has handed a dirty deal to and that ain't bitter. Crazy, that's what you'll say, and the Madam here will say. All right—crazy. And what of it? I ain't so crazy but what I can do a friend a good turn—but what I can make a life a little happier for the next fellow. I don't want to shock you or your lady here, but I've done time. And I want you to know it!"

"Well," Barry commented, with a brief laugh, "that doesn't make you any less a friend of mine!"

The man looked at him keenly, his watery eyes pale in a leprous face.

"Boy," he said, with emotion, "I didn't know they made 'em like you, any more. Say, you ain't the du Spain that owns this place, are you?" he added suddenly.

"That's what I am," Barry said.

The man glanced from Barry to Barbara, straightened up, and spoke with a sort of apologetic dignity.

"Then I'm a trespasser on your place, folks," he said. "Old Slinder has been living here like a rat in a cheese for a week. I ain't hurt your place, neighbor. Your Portuguese turned your cattle on to the next farm, but a lot of 'em's strayed back, and I've watched 'em for ye. I'm bunking in the little shack down here past the windmill, and I didn't want to scare ye with my fire—so I come up. If you'll let me stay there until tomorrow I'll get out."

"Well," said Barry, "I don't see any reason for you to be in a hurry. My—my wife and I have come down to stay here for awhile and get the place somewhat into shape. I'm writing a play, and when it's finished, we'll rent the place and go on to New York. Meanwhile—Barbara, how about the eats?"

In Barbara's coat pocket there was the little collapsible metal cup she and Barry took on their tramps and picnics, she fumbled for it, and mixed her own coffee in it rather than send Barry on another trip to the big house. The sandwiches were served on the pasteboard cover of the box in which Amy—how many centuries ago!—had packed them. The stranger neatly and deftly mended the fire, he praised everything, and was voluble in helpful, respectful suggestions as to the management of the ranch.

The food made Barbara feel dreamy and stupid; she sat listening to the men's voices dully, too tired to stir, even to begin to clear away the papers and cups.

In a very agony of effort, she presently lighted a long, new candle, without a stick, and staggered into the adjoining room, tossing the contents of her suitcases wearily about in the dim candlelight. She smeared her face and hands generously with cold cream; no towel, but Amy had spread the pretty linen covers, with their cross-stitched "B. A.", over both cases, and Barbara used them without hesitation.

The streaks and stains of black came off readily, and she felt better. She loosened her hair and brushed it; took off her apron and went cautiously to the closed door.

Barry's appreciative chuckles and the stranger's droning voice were still keeping each other company; Barry was enchanted with his new acquaintance, and Barbara could hear his enthusiastic: "By golly, that's the most wonderful stuff I ever heard in my life!" as Slinder described jails and police courts, county hospitals, crooked roulette games, and the codes and customs of hold-up men.

Suddenly a determined light came into Barbara's eyes, and with extraordinary quickness and noiselessness she undressed, slipped in between the blankets that even now seemed none too dry or sweet smelling, blew out her candle, and placed herself in a position that simulated sleep.

Her heart beat high, but whether with nervousness, anger, fatigue, bewilderment, or a mixture of all four emotions, she did not stop to consider.

She could hear the sea, far off in the dark, and now and then a break-

ing noise in the fire, in the adjoining room, and the fresh crackle of flames. And she could hear Barry's voice, amused and eager, and the droning recitation of the stranger.

For awhile she lay wakeful, conscious of her rapid heartbeats, and of the strangeness and discomfort of the sheetless, low bed on the floor of the unknown room.

". . . goes over there, slips Con a wink, puts down his roll . . ." That was Slinder.

"My God, what priceless stuff!" That was Barry.

Barbara's eyes closed, she turned slightly, snuggled her face against the soggy pillow. She was too tired to care, too tired to remember all that had happened since she had gone into the kitchen on a foggy, gloomy, smoky morning, to put the cupboard in order. Too tired to resent anything or wonder about anything any more.

She was asleep.

CHAPTER X

In all the years of their friendship, she had often called him a child. But she was married to Barry du Spain before she began really to feel how much of a child he was.

He would be companionable, happy, carefree, and deliciously amusing when everything went exactly as he liked. But Barry had his own very definite ideas about what he wanted, and it took only a trifle to upset him. There was no laughing him out of a sulky or resentful mood.

Barbara, like a million other young wives, speedily learned how to avoid occasions of dispute. And she was rewarded by his passionate young love, intense to the point of actual agony.

He liked to be lazy in the mornings; but only until that instant when sudden interest in breakfast and the day awakened. Then she must fly to be ready in time for him. He loved argument, but she must not present to him forcefully any detail he had not foreseen. Picnics and gipsy expeditions generally were his delight; but he must suggest them. If Barbara impulsively planned something of the sort, she was sure to be met with his cool "I don't feel a bit like it today. I couldn't. I'd much rather stay right here, comfortable and lazy, and talk, and read, and have waffles for lunch."

But, on the other hand, simple acquiescence in his own way made him delightfully happy. He teased her, he kissed her, he was inexhaustible in jokes. His conversation had all the wild charm of Pan, at one moment wise and old, at the next fanciful and childish beyond believing.

They played about the disreputable old place like two young kittens; chasing each other through the barns and paddocks, shouting with laughter, trying a hundred absurd experiments every hour. They dragged furniture about, and walked to the crossroads store at Milo, two miles

away, for wire and paint and cans of corn and tomatoes. They drove the wheelbarrow through the stiff mud to Tomas Bettancourt's ranch, next to their own, and brought back Barry's chickens, tied in couples, and clucking their sense of outrage all the way.

Almost every luncheon hour found them down on the rocky shore, picnicking with whatever their larder afforded, opposite Abalone Rock. The great black projection three hundred feet from the cliff stood out high and bold against the west, and the seas foamed and volleyed and surged ineffectually about its feet. Slimy seaweeds draped it at water level; above them were a thousand crevices and jutting edges and shelves.

When Barry worked his cautious way along the line of sharp rocky teeth that attached it to the shore, Barbara had to go away. She could not watch his progress to its perilous height, she could not answer his shouts of triumph when he stood at last on what, to her, still seemed dangerous and terrifying foothold.

He would bring her back two or three abalones, wrenched from their suction hold on the underside of the rocks, beneath sea level, and Barbara cut the delicious fish into chowders and kept the pearled iridescent shells for garden borders. But she was never quite happy when Barry went out to Abalone Rock.

Working about her home, she wore dark blue kitchen ginghams, and Barry adored her in them, and interrupted her domestic duties to kiss the soft warm place at the back of her neck, where the copper curls crept down. She made him waffles and soups and marvelous salads, and they had not been married for a week before they had their favorite dishes: omelettes with melted currant jelly, biscuits with dates cut into them.

Resolutely, the girl made the world perfect for him. She was always free when he wanted to walk or explore, she cooked and painted, swept and raked, mixed chicken food and peeled potatoes at his pleasure, with her own peculiar spirit and grace.

On the Monday that followed their wedding, they moved into the big house, or rather into the three enormous rooms of it that they had had time to make habitable. These rooms were the kitchen, an icy apartment next to the kitchen, whose floor level was actually a few feet lower than that of the garden outside, and a smaller room, once used for drying peppers and hams and herbs, and reached by a fascinating flight of three or four adobe steps behind the fireplace, which was to be Barry's workshop and study.

The igloo, as they called the cold room, was intended for a bedroom, and into it they moved a magnificent old four-poster from upstairs, two large bureaus whose drawers stuck from damp and disuse, and all the rugs and chairs and smaller tables available. Even so, the room looked only half furnished, and was so bitterly cold that the kitchen door must be left open all day long, so that the stove and fireplace heat might render it fairly habitable at night.

Barbara grew tired of fighting cold; of aching and shuddering with it.

November. Well, in California, February was spring—they could think of that.

Besides the three rooms, they cleaned out a sort of storeroom, to be used as a washroom until they could have it properly fitted with basin and tub; they cleaned the pantry and the woodshed, polished the twinkling thick panes that filled some of the small windows, cut away masses of dark wet vines from about the bedroom eaves, gathered picturesque bits of pottery and glass from all the upstairs rooms—the hacienda possessed about twenty rooms, and had sheltered more than that many guests at a time in its day—and banished all possible ugliness from the kitchen.

Here, on the soft old irregular floor of warm brown tiles, Barbara set her table, established her reading lamp and chair, aligned her few books, puttered absorbedly over her cooking, and, in general, lived those hours she spent indoors.

Every morning at about ten o'clock, after the leisurely breakfast they loved, and much affectionate praise of each other's suggestions for the beautifying of the place, Barry left her, carrying pencils and papers up to the workshop that was tucked in like a bird's nest behind the big chimney.

Barbara, left alone, reveled in housewifeliness. She scraped and piled dishes, straightened chairs, and brushed the tiled floor. While the kettle was heating, she went into the cold bedroom, forcing herself not to slight the duty of making everything orderly and comfortable there, even on days so cold that she had to wrap herself in two sweaters to get through it at all.

Then back to hot water and the pleasant washing of the dishes she and Barry discussed so inexhaustibly and admired so much—his mother's Canton cups, not many of them, but beauties, Spanish plates, blue bowls, old glass, thin old silver. Nothing matched anything else; some of the platters were ridiculously large, for two persons' use, and some of the pitchers were cracked.

But no matter, they all looked enchanting when they were set out in rows on the ledge that ran like a shelf all about the room. When, hot and shining, they were all in place, Barbara capably rinsed her dishtowels, and hung them over the stove to dry. She and Amy had read in the back of a magazine a reminder to the effect that this simple habit would save the housekeeper the unsavory necessity of washing great numbers of them every week, and although they had never risen to this height at the Atherton kitchen, Barbara began her married life with a determination to adhere to it.

Then came the part of her morning she enjoyed. A saucepan of warm food—usually the cereal saucepan, for Barbara had only a few pots—must be carried out to the chickens. These pensioners, at first all alike to Barbara, and merely to be regarded as a care, had had time to impress

their several identities upon her now, and she found herself wishing that she might spend hours in their company.

Instead, there were always a hundred things to do, all sorts of fascinating employments that tended to the one end—the complete restoration of the hacienda. The flags of the patio, long sunken under silt and grass, must be unearthed one by one. The old fountain must be freed of accumulated weeds and dirt, and the patio doorway, stuck tight in mud, must be put in order to shut off this little place of silence and shadows once more. The palms and pampas and roses had all grown wild, the ground was matted thick with eucalyptus sickles and pepper leaves, and rubbish of all sorts, barrels and boxes, jars and empty cans and broken china had been flung carelessly here for too many years.

Barbara, assisted enthusiastically in the cold short winter afternoons by a perspiring, radiant Barry, kept a bonfire going for days at a time. This patio, to her, represented the starting point. Radiating from the patio, her beautifying touch was to permeate the entire hacienda, the old bottle windows were to look out on roses and brick paths once more, rather than on jungles of undergrowth; the fountain was to play among the blue shadows of the old plastered walls, and doves were to walk and to murmur on the weather-softened tiles of the low roofs.

The place was built of adobe, as substantially as a fort. In no place was it more than two stories high, and in many one or one and a half. Along the upper floor, in places, ran narrow poled balconies, sifted deep now in leaves and rubbish. At three angles, house walls and balconies framed the patio; on the fourth ran the high garden wall, cut only by the single narrow, arched gate.

Barbara's kitchen window sills were two feet thick; many of the rooms on the ground floor had no windows at all and were lighted only when the shuttered doors were open. They had been used, in the days of the hacienda's prime, for storage purposes, or for the casual housing of the servants of guests, who had flung themselves down contentedly on their master's traveling bags for the few hours' slumber that remained between the all-night dancing down at the bunkhouse and the early start in the dawn.

There was no inside stairway; two or three flights of narrow wooden stairs rose from the patio to the balconies. Upstairs, all the rooms were in a straight row, with the balcony for a hallway; there were no closets, no bathrooms, no dressing rooms. The casa long antedated the days of the gold rush, of the covered wagons and the pioneers; it was several decades more than a hundred years old.

In the cellar were empty wine casks and bottles, still scented with the blood of the famous muscat grapes that had filled them. Barbara found apples there, pyramids of them, rotting and soft, potatoes and cabbages, filling the air with a decaying, mouldy, earthy smell, rows of old jams and jellies—sweet and clean when their glass containers had been wiped and the deep furry scum that coated them lifted away.

Everything eatable Barbara brought upstairs, stacking one of many newly emptied and whitewashed tributary kitchens with winter provender, in good housewifely fashion. Barry scraped and shoveled and piled everything else into a length of old sailcloth, providentially discovered just as need for it arose, and dragged it out to the insatiable bonfire. The cellar, with its earthen floor raked and smooth, its cobwebs and rubbish swept away, and a slant of winter sunshine striking upon its emptiness and order through a rubbed western window, was so heartening a sight that Barbara and Barry tiptoed cautiously down the steep stairs more than once, to stand with their arms locked, contemplating it in ecstasy.

It was in vain that the girl determined that every afternoon she would heat a kettle of water, take a sponge bath, and dress herself freshly, with neatly brushed hair, for supper and the evening. The days were too full and too tiring. The happy hours in the fresh, salty winter airs, the happy meals, when she and Barry linked their grimed tired hands and talked nonsense for half-hours together, the novelty and zest of this strange way of living overcame her day after day.

Barry kept her supplied with heavy wood, but she flashed out through the patio and into the woodshed yard a dozen times a day for smaller kindling. There were two lamps to fill, an oily, wretched business, involving rags and funnel. There were favorite dishes to prepare, not the simplest of dishes by any means. There were soup to strain and fires to watch, and a rush to the chicken yard for a last egg hunt, and a pause by the pump to watch the winter sunset glorifying the shores and the sea, and perhaps a gossip with Tomas—the neighbor who came over every night with milk from their own cows, still wintering on Tomas's ranch.

Every day had its animated discussions, its problems, and its fascination. Barbara brought to the ranch life her own spirited originality; she had reasons and opinions about the questions of pasturage, crops, and cattle. The cows must be left with Tomas until the spring, when their own fields would be green. The expected calf Barbara herself would shelter and raise; the white one-eyed hen must eventually be allowed to set, but not until the nights were a little warmer.

It was a great occasion when she and Barry sawed into short lengths the big fig tree that had fallen across the very center of the patio and lain there for some six or seven years, and added its chopped trunk to the wood pile beside the kitchen door. They struggled and panted and toiled over this great affair for two days, and in the increased light that streamed into the downstairs rooms, and the improved appearance of the cleared space where the tree had lain, Barbara felt a swelling pride that lasted for a long time.

She studied the financial situation seriously. Their taxes were in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars a year, their income began with the two dollars per month per cow that Tomas, who had a dairy business, paid Barry—seven cows, that meant fourteen dollars—the occa-

sional sale of a calf to the butcher for perhaps seven or eight dollars every spring, and the rare, amazing joy when a poem was sold, and an editor's check for ten, or twenty, or even fifty dollars gave Barbara cause for awed thanksgiving.

They did not have to buy cattle feed, for Tomas took care of that; it was only a bag of chicken grain now and then, their own food, incidentals, and—some day, of course—new clothes. Still, even these unimportant-sounding items had a perplexing way of amounting to comparatively large sums. Stamps and long envelopes made holes in silver dollars; new axes cost almost five, and even innocent-looking lengths of glass-toweling, and rope at nine cents a foot, came to surprising totals. Barbara bought her butter from Tomas's wife, a sloe-eyed little Portuguese who lived in a dark, unaired kitchen, continually smiling, and covering fat dark babies with thick, odorous quilts; Tomas brought milk every night, and the chickens, encouraged by personal attentions and fed with hot cooked mash, produced astonishing numbers of eggs.

Then there were apples and hard pears and carrots and cabbages and potatoes now, and there would be other fruits and vegetables in the spring. The big blackheart cherry tree was famed for its fruit, the peaches and apples and apricots would come along a few weeks after it set the fashion.

But, even then, one must buy sugar, coffee, flour, starch, soap, matches, thread, ink, soda, baking powder, nails, lard and a hundred things of which other women never thought when they said lightly: "They can raise practically everything themselves!" Barbara used to laugh, in early days, at the long lists she had to pencil out for shopping tours to the small crossroads store at Milo.

"The brown sugar and raisins aren't absolutely necessary, darling," she would say, loitering on the high doorstep with her arms linked about Barry's neck, in farewell, "but the oatmeal and pepper and soup bones we must have!"

And she would lay her radiant cheek against his, rubbing her forehead gently up and down like an affectionate pony.

"Don't let any casual passing tourist make eyes at my handsome husband!"

His face would flush, like that of a protesting child with his mother.

"Barbara, as if I could ever look at anyone but you!" The beautiful blue eyes would smile at her reproachfully. "Sweetheart, were ever any two persons in the world as happy as we are?" he would ask.

"I don't believe it!"

"Babs, you know that I *worship* you, don't you?"

"I kind of think maybe you do."

"And if I act cranky and inhospitable," Barry might say penitently, "it's only because I want you all to myself!"

"And if I want to ask all our friends from Cottonwood down here, for a sort of housewarming," Barbara might answer, in the same care-

fully calculated, light tone, "it's only because I don't want to seem rude —and more than that, I don't want them to be wondering and surmising things about us. Some Sunday afternoon we'll have a few roast chickens, and a lot of buttered bread, and I'll make a cake——"

But Barry never would yield a point.

"Then I'll not be here!" he would exclaim, instantly aroused to the hostile attitude he had taken when the question had first been raised. And from a loving mood of confidence and content, he would be angered, distressed, and alienated from her completely again. "You know how I hate the idea of a lot of people roaming around here, criticizing and poking!" he would exclaim feverishly. "I'd hate it! I'll not stand it. You're enough for me, God knows, more than enough—my cup is full —I only ask my wife and my home and my work. And why you want Harry Poett and Lucy Barnard giggling and yelling all over the place——"

"I only thought that, when February comes, you cross-grained child, you, when the buttercups are up, and the fruit trees in bloom, we could have the most delicious party——"

"Party! Oh, my God, you conventional woman and your parties. Frosted cocoanut cake, I suppose, and mottoes! All right, go ahead, give your parties, but I won't be here. I'll go over to Tomas's, and Maria Bettancourt will give me some stew for supper—tell them your husband loathes the whole damn' lot of them——"

"Barry! Barry! How silly you are. Stop talking like such a crazy man. Stop it. I'm not so crazy to give a party as all this excitement comes to. But I'm proud of my home. I'd love to have my old friends here——"

But perhaps he would have flung himself away from her and started on his walk to the store, two miles away, his handsome head bent, his long legs carrying him in frenzied strides over the rough wet clods of the fields.

Sometimes, in the beginning, Barbara wept after such a scene, and went about her dinner preparations with wet eyes and a heaving breast. But it was not natural to her to harbor resentment, and Barry would scarcely be out of hearing before her love for him, her happiness in his affection and his content, would melt her heart completely, and she would putter about the kitchen in a very fever of eagerness for reconciliation.

Barry, however, could carry bitterness of soul over some such trifling altercation as this for hours, and it was always Barbara who must make the first advance toward friendship. This she found it impossible not to do. No matter how unreasonable he had been, no matter how childish and rude, the knowledge that one apologetic, placating word from her would make him happy again was a temptation too strong to resist.

And when she had once broken the ice, Barry would soften instantly, stammering, choking, weeping, and clinging to her as if she had been indeed the mother whose part she found herself playing so often.

No use being reasonable or logical with Barry; this was mere waste of

time. Altercations and arguments never exhausted him, he could go back to their very grammar school days, years ago, to unearth some unflattering recollection of her to prove his point; he could defend himself with all the zeal of a devil's advocate. His rudeness had been quite unconscious, her construction upon what he said had been entirely mistaken; he had had only her comfort, her welfare, her happiness in mind in acting as he had. And she was the least grateful, and sensitive, and appreciative of women.

His storm of words bewildered and tired her. Far wiser to agree with him always, give him his way in everything, and wait until the storm passed, and her ashamed and sorry little boy returned, as he always did return, to her knees, for forgiveness.

Wonderful hours these, when Barry, exhausted with fury and excitement, was gentle, generous, thoughtful again, and when his restored happiness made him more than ever the exquisitely amusing companion, the beautiful, joyous, gifted lover whom she had once called Pan and human child in one.

"Barry, you are so silly to let such little things excite you so. Don't you think that next time you could remember that we *always* come to an amicable agreement, that things always work out for the best?"

"Babs—" he would turn at her knee, firelight aureoling his magnificent black mane with scarlet, his eyes pulsing with strange sapphire lights, in the shadow—"Babs, I promise you I will, on my sacred honor."

But he never did. It was quite impossible that he ever should, and although he never could understand this, Barbara presently did, and conceded in her heart, as women must concede the unthinkable and unbearable, that this was a part of the price she must pay for her genius husband.

On the other hand, Barry was childishly simple and indifferent to both his own extraordinary beauty and to the serious attention that famous folk, in far-away and unknown New York, began to pay to his work. Almost all his poetry was accepted, and although all the magazines did not pay well, and sometimes the work of two days would bring him in something like ten or twelve dollars, yet the letters that accompanied the acceptances were astonishing to Barbara.

Eastern reviews were beginning to speak of him with great respect: "Du Spain, the Californian who can apparently pack whatever meaning he pleases into faultlessly rhythmic phrases," "Du Spain, whose little gems of verse say all this and much more," "Barry du Spain, a name, we would warn our readers, with which they may as well make themselves respectfully familiar."

Poets wrote him, poets of the younger school. They wrote him ungrammatically, in sprawling hands, but what they said made Barbara's heart sing.

"Dear du Spain, your 'Chloe' was dam' good. By God, that's poetry—

not like my own pig wash," they said. Or, "Why the blankety-blank don't you come on here and let a feller have a look at you?"

Barbara regretted their coarseness but rejoiced in the friendliness and generosity they showed. She kept all the letters, that Barry would have used to wedge the table leg or light the fire.

Sometimes college professors wrote; might they use Mr du Spain's lovely "Girl with Blue Eyes" to illustrate a lecture? Sometimes club women wrote: Was there a Mrs du Spain, and were Mr du Spain's poems —"Bread Puddings and a Lady," "Girl with Blue Eyes," and "Laughter"—inspired by her?

Barry was working furiously now upon a period play, to be called *Napoleon Third*. If it was taken, and produced, of course he and Barbara would have to go to New York and see it.

"Oh, Barry, imagine us in a box!"

"I'd buy you everything, Barbara. Furs and big hats—you'd be the most envied woman in the world! We'd give entertainments that'd knock their eyes out."

This was the man talking, and on the whole she liked him less than the child. For sometimes, following this line of thought, he would become magnificent and affected, and Barbara would suspect, from the nature of his discourse, that in his own mind he thought he was talking to these poets and editors and managers in the East.

"By God, if you write what's in your heart, what does it matter whether the piffling fool of a public gets you or not? What the hell is the public to me? I'm free of 'em! I'll be damned if I'll ever kneel to 'em and lick their dirty boots. Write what you dam' well want to write——"

"Less damns, darling. You are merely addressing the simple rustic woman who is your wife!"

And then he would laugh suddenly, half ashamed, half amused, all little boy again, and perhaps come around the lunch table to kneel beside her and link his long arms about her waist.

"Barberry Bush, are you the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"I have been told so."

"Well, I think you are! Are you happy, darling—are you really happy down on this big, lonely place, with a cranky husband and no servant and no neighbors?"

"You know I'm happy!"

"Well, but you never *say* so, dearest."

The fountain didn't bubble in quite the old way, perhaps. Marriage wasn't girlhood; wives had responsibilities, cares, soberer joys and closer fears than girls could know. Barbara and Amy had decided years ago that they despised these giggling, girlish wives who boasted that the great step made no change. Wifehood *was* a change, and happy marriage was a business that demanded infinite courage and patience, like any other.

CHAPTER XI

BARBARA DID NOT GO to Amy's wedding in mid-January, conceding this point to Barry as balancing another great concession from him. That anything in the world could have kept her away from Amy on this day, she perhaps would not have believed, a few months earlier. But, under the circumstances, she felt that she had no choice.

In the joyous confusion of her own hasty wedding, she and Barry had mentioned more than once the time "when Amy's married and Dad comes to us for awhile." It had been tacitly understood, Barbara really believed, that such was to be the arrangement.

But when the first weeks of their life at the ranch had grown to months and the holidays were over, Barry appeared to feel differently about it. The cold and the constant, if exhilarating, struggle to keep themselves warm and fed had made this first plan seem not quite so simple. What would he do at the ranch, a gentle old professor who liked his morning paper and his morning bath, Barry asked thoughtfully, one afternoon about a week before Amy's wedding.

Barbara's heart gave a plunge of sheer, unreasoning terror. Not have Dad at the ranch——!

"And where would he sleep?" Barry pursued considerately. "He'd be fearfully uncomfortable here."

"He's a terribly good sport—you don't know how wonderful he is! He'll fit into our arrangements here as well as you do."

"He'd probably be far happier at Mrs Pheland's."

"At twenty dollars a week. It would be a ridiculous waste!"

"Well, he has the rent of the house. It would be much the most sensible arrangement, even if you are too much afraid of hurting his feelings to make it. He comes down here—he has nothing to do—he breaks in on the most important part of my work——"

Barbara opened the stove lid to put a dustpan full of small sweepings into the fire.

"Barry, isn't it senseless to talk so? Nothing on earth would persuade me to write my father that it wasn't convenient to have him here. I simply couldn't do it!"

"You wouldn't have to do it. All you'd have to say is that the roads are simply awful between here and Cottonwood, and that we have no bathroom."

"He knows that. He was down here with Amy on my birthday—on Christmas Eve. Don't you remember they brought me a book from Link?"

"Other women can be perfectly simple and natural with their fathers," Barry muttered, beginning carefully to replace the scattered parts of the clock he was repairing, and squinting at a small cog threateningly.

"You can't. You're always imagining he's getting hurt feelings. Whereas he probably would be actually relieved——"

"Don't talk nonsense!" Barbara requested shortly. She plunged her hands into a dishpan full of white suds, extracted tea cloths, and began to rub and rinse them capably. Wringing them firmly, she caught them by two corners and snapped them in the air; a fine warm fog floated to her own flushed cheeks as she did so, and with the back of her wet hand she pushed the hair from her forehead.

"There is no mistake in the world," Barry said solemnly, "like the mistake of things-in-law living together. It *never* works."

"Well, it'll work in this case!" Barbara prophesied lightly. But she was trembling.

"If your father was needy," Barry pursued, searching on the floor with narrowed eyes for an escaped wheel, "if he couldn't do anything else, even *then*——"

"Oh, Barry, please don't rag about it so! My father expects to come out here with me, after Amy is married—she and Ward are going to drive south in his car and send the trunks by rail—and I want him to come here, and that's all there is about it. Amy divided towels and sheets and so on to the last *clothes-pin*, and I have plenty of linen." Barbara stopped, worked busily in silence.

"Will you do this? Will you write your father and put the case to him simply," Barry persisted, "and explain that we know he'd be wretchedly uncomfortable here? If you'll do that and he still decides to come, then I promise you I'll be as agreeable as I can to him."

"Why, but that's nonsense! He'd be perfectly amazed and terribly hurt."

Barbara was stretching her arms to their utmost, pinning her wet towels to the high string that had been extended above the stove.

"Very well, then, don't complain of the way I treat him," Barry said, instantly at white heat. "This is my house and I intend to be master of it. I've always liked your father and I've always been kind to your father, but when it comes to his coming down here, in the first few weeks of my marriage, I think I have a right to kick, and I think ninety-nine men out of a hundred would kick."

"But you didn't say that before we were married!"

"I didn't *know* it before we were married. I didn't know how I'd feel about it. I do know now, and I feel very strongly. If you disregard my politely and quietly expressed wishes, if you go into town at half-past four in a winter morning with Tomas Bettancourt, perhaps catching your death of cold, arriving at Mrs Pheland's before six, arousing everyone, and causing a lot of talk, everyone probably saying that your husband couldn't afford to get a taxi to take you in to your sister's wedding—if you court publicity and gossip that way, and make my name a joke——"

"Now, darling, now, darling, *please* don't get yourself all worked up. If I went in with Tomas on the milk wagon, I'd adore the ride, and I'd

slip into Amy's room at Mrs Pheland's before anyone in the place was up. A taxi would cost four dollars, and it simply isn't worth it—I'll probably have to come back in a taxi, anyway. *Please* don't let your imagination run away with you."

"And don't call me darling! You're going directly against my wishes, you're doing your best to ruin our marriage, you're bringing your father down here in defiance of my express request, and you think you can make it all right by calling me 'darling'!"

A silence. It was three o'clock on a dark January afternoon, rain was sluicing down in wildly blown gray sheets over the ranch house, and although both stove and fireplace were burning briskly, the room seemed damp and cool, and was heavily scented with wood smoke. Both lamps were lighted.

"Barry, you can't think that I could stay away from Amy's wedding?"

Silence. He had completed the tinkering with the clock now and shook it gently, afterward holding it to his ear and setting it down on the table before him to watch its operation. His face was frowning and dark.

"If it was a question of causing talk," Barbara added, *"that* would cause more talk than anything else! Everyone would think that I had gone out of my senses!"

Silence. Silence. Wood snapped on the fire, rain spattered and splashed outside of the dim window. And far away the sea broke and thundered and was still, and broke and thundered again, on the shore.

"Very well," Barbara said to herself with spirit, "if he won't speak to me, I won't speak to him. I can keep this up as long as he can!"

When he suddenly got up from the table and buttoned himself into his heavy coat, and pulled a cap down over his ears, she said nothing. And when he had gone, she put on her own thick coat and a soft woolly tam and went out into the wind and rain herself.

She walked rapidly along the shore, enjoying the battle of the wild airs, looking out at the lashed and lashing sea as she was blown along, and thinking hard.

Poor Barry. He'd return heartbroken. Baked potatoes and bacon for dinner—both favorites—and French toast with guava jelly. The guava jelly was a mystery but none the less welcome. Where the fat little sugar-topped jars had come from nobody knew; Barry rather thought that a grocer in Cottonwood, who had failed, years ago, had sent them to his mother as payment of a loan. But he and Barbara liked them too much to care how they had happened to get them.

Tonight he should find an especially nice dinner and an especially sweet wife. No allusions to the recent storm; just a dignified and generous acceptance of the situation. Of course she'd have to go in to Amy's wedding, and of course she'd have to bring Dad back with her. Barry might consider himself fortunate enough if she did not demand his attendance at the event as well.

What could he do, poor ill-tempered boy, if she defied him flatly and

rudely in this case and in every other that might arise? Well, he could be disagreeable to Dad, of course, and that might cause a temporary uncomfortableness. If Dad were hurt and went home . . .

But apart from that, what could Barry do? Sulk and be silent for days and weeks. But no man did that! He'd have to come to his senses sooner or later.

Meanwhile, would he and she mope about this place where they had been so happy and for which they had made so many plans? That would be a stupid, childish thing to do.

Barbara remembered the case of Ann Lee, a Cottonwood girl who had married a man named Earle Thornton. Ann had returned to her mother exactly three months after her marriage, explaining quite freely and unembarrassedly to her friends that Earle Thornton was "just simply a crazy man." Yet Earle had married the oldest Robinson girl, some years later, and they appeared quite happy.

Was Barry just a little crazy? Or was the closeness and isolation of their life down here too much of a strain for his poetic nerves? Or was this just one of those young lover's quarrels of which one heard so often? Barbara had never quarreled with anyone in her life.

Her walk disposed of her own nerves and depression and excitement, in any case; she found herself looking wistfully for Barry's brown overcoat on the hills or on the shore as she went. But she did not find him.

The potatoes were baked, the French toast piled in a golden-brown heap, the strips of bacon laid out and waiting by six—by half-past six—by seven o'clock. But he did not come in.

Barbara's face, flushed with cooking, paled again with anger and surprise. She ate her own supper, resolutely reading a most interesting book, put his potato and toast on a plate in the oven, brushed the top of the stove, set the oatmeal soaking in the double boiler, and reduced the kitchen to scrupulous order.

At half-past eight, to the drowsy dripping of the rain and purring of the fire, she went to bed, taking with her the rather forlorn old cat she and Barry had found wandering about, and somewhat tamed, for the occasion was lonesome and quiet enough to make her a little nervous.

The cat, purring violently, stepped about at the foot of the bed, settled herself, changed her position, and again succumbed. Barbara, finding it so cold in the bedroom that her exposed arms, holding her book, became chilled, put out her light, rolled herself up snugly, and went sensibly off to sleep.

Later, she started suddenly awake and found herself frightened. The bedroom was dark, but soft red firelight was streaming into it through the open kitchen door. Swiftly, without thinking what she did, the girl sprang from bed, and went quickly toward the encouraging warmth and light.

There was a couch in the kitchen, and upon it, covered with blankets and his own coat, Barry was lying, only half undressed, and sound asleep. Upon his fine face, painted with unnatural color by the fire, and ex-

traordinarily young and beautiful with the lashes lowered, and the dark, rich crest of his hair in disorder, there remained a dark and angry frown.

The morning began with the same smoldering silence. The two went to and fro, passing each other, elaborately avoiding each other's eyes.

Coffee was shared in silence; the meal was unwontedly brief, and before she had fairly finished her last mouthful of toast Barbara was on her feet, putting her chair in its place against the wall, gathering plates and spoons, capably commencing the kitchen clearance.

Barry brought in wood; bright sunshine danced through the wide doorway from a soaked and sparkling world. The cool air, rushing in, was rich with spring promise; the smell of wet earth and buttercups, grass, and the salt sea.

"Barry, this is extremely silly!" Barbara burst out unexpectedly, when he had gathered together his working materials and was obviously ready to mount to his little workshop.

His dark face darkened still more; he made an attempt to pass her with half-lidded eyes.

But she put her hands on his shoulders.

"Barry, we can't keep this up!" There was protestant laughter in her voice. "It's too utterly foolish!"

"I don't think it's foolish to try to protect the sacredness and happiness of my home," Barry said suddenly, in a hard, resentful voice.

"Darling, the sacredness and happiness of our home is just as dear to me as to you!"

Suddenly he broke.

"Oh, Barbara, I've been in hell!" he cried. "I've been suffering—you don't know what I've been suffering! For God's sake, be good to me!"

"Good to you!" Barbara exclaimed, her young strong arms instantly about him and their wet cheeks together. "Dearest, I've been wretcheder than you about it."

For a long luxurious minute they clung together, the man's face dropped on her shoulder. Then she began cautiously, maternally:

"But I *have* to go to my sister's wedding, Barry dear——"

And instantly he was furious again. He flung her off rather than released her, and his face actually paled with the violence of his revulsion of feeling.

"Are you going to begin that again?"

"Begin it? Barry darling, I've never stopped it. I have to go to Amy's wedding. She's my only sister. I couldn't *consider*——"

"Listen," Barry interrupted her, with a great air of patience and self-control, "*if* we were living in Cottonwood, right near her, I wouldn't say a word. *If* we had a car, of course I'd want you to go. *If* we'd gone into town for any other thing, since our marriage, we might be expected to go now.

"*But*—" he went on oratorically, as Barbara merely regarded him help-

lessly and ruefully, as a mother might stand regarding a puzzling child—"but we *have* no car. We never go into town! It would mean your getting up at half-past three, and driving twelve miles on the front seat of a milk wagon, arriving at Mrs Pheland's——"

"Barry dear, we went all over this yesterday!"

He stared at her a moment, his face livid.

"You mean you're going?"

"I mean I *have* to go!"

"Then don't come back here!" he answered furiously. "You can go to hell for all I care!"

He flung himself from the room. Barbara, trembling a little, and with more than one rending deep sigh, went composedly on with her housework. This was Wednesday. Amy was to be married very quietly on Saturday morning.

Silence. Silence. Their luncheon was so silent that a sea gull, walking about the patio, came to the kitchen doorway and regarded them with a tipped head and bright beady eye.

Silence all afternoon, all evening. Barbara told herself that she would not have believed that silence could be so heavy to bear. The leaden moments seemed to add themselves together and to weigh on her heart.

Well, he would have to get over his tantrum, because to hurt Amy's feelings was the one thing Barbara could not and would not do.

Yet the unnatural stillness between them began to be an advocate for Barry. A woman had to stick to her husband first and foremost, after all, Barbara mused. His motive in not wanting her to take the long cold drive into town on the milk wagon was a loyal and protecting one, tempered perhaps by a little shame that his young wife should be reduced to such a mode of travel.

When Barbara thought of Barry, the free and romantic and beautiful, as being ashamed that he could not afford the eight dollars that would take her to and from Cottonwood on Amy's wedding day, her heart ached for him with a strange, pitying pain.

He gave her every cent he had; indeed, he had given her the ranch, pushing the deed into her hand bashfully, a few days after their marriage. He had "just thought of it one day," he had said. He had "wanted" her "to have it"; she had "all the business sense of the family, anyway!"

And he *was* a genius, poor Barry. And meanwhile they were wasting the first golden, radiant days of spring in this senseless fight!

"Barry," she began, on Friday morning, after the endless hours of Thursday, silent, lifeless, hostile—broken only by one or two fresh bursts of altercation and fresh inflexible opposition to her plans on Barry's part—had somehow been survived, "I'm going in with Tomas tomorrow—I have to go. I'm as sorry as I can be to distress you so, but I think you've taken an unreasonable position, and I've simply got to act as seems wisest. Amy'd never forgive me if I wasn't at her wedding, even if I'd ever

forgive myself. I'll probably bring my father out here sometime in the afternoon."

"Not to this house, you won't!" Barry gritted, through shut teeth.

"Don't be ridiculous. You certainly wouldn't want to face the talk of the whole town."

"Oh, to hell with the town! You conventional women, always thinking of the neighbors. You bring your father down here tomorrow and he'll find my door shut in his face! And you can leave me the next day if you want to."

Barbara began to brush about the stove carefully, coaxing the little fragments of ashes and dust with the tip of her broom. She forced herself to think of tomorrow. She must wear a sweater under her coat, for the cold start before dawn. How did one wake one's self at half-past three, anyway? She must pack in a suitcase tonight the silk dress she would wear to the wedding.

For her father's room she had selected a small apartment on the second floor, across the patio, and up the balcony stairs, and so some distance from the kitchen. If the beautiful weather returned, as it must, although today was bleak and foggy, he would be flooded with sun in the daytime, and at night he must have their bedroom oil stove, and the blankets that Barry was using for his couch bed in the kitchen.

Barry, standing in the middle of the kitchen, was still raging at her. She must think of other things.

"Answer me! I won't have you ignore me—treat me with such disgusting rudeness!" he shouted.

"Answer you what, Barry?"

"I say that a man has a right to expect his home to himself, and that his wife will not bring under his roof persons uncongenial to him—and I say . . ."

Oh, she was so tired of it all. She was so tired of that hard, hammering voice, so tired of the arguments for and against.

He had snatched his coat from the wooden pin by the kitchen door, pulled on his cap again. He wasn't going to work this morning; too much upset, probably. A drift of cold fog blew into the kitchen as he slammed the door behind him, and Barbara was alone.

The hours passed and Barry did not return. Barbara went out into the fog to attend to her chickens, brought in a bowlful of warm white eggs to which tiny curled feathers still clung, and baked a panful of fluffy brown-topped white biscuits. Barry loved them, hot or cold, and he could have them for his lonely breakfast tomorrow—the first breakfast, almost the first meal since their wedding, that they had not shared!—and for his lunch, too.

She and Dad would drive out at about four o'clock on Saturday afternoon, in plenty of time for Barbara to get her two men an appetizing dinner. And suppose Barry wouldn't speak to her father?

Oh, well, but of course he would.

Tomas came in with the mail at about eleven, returning from his milk route. An ecstatic and excited note from Amy; everyone was being perfectly wonderful about the wedding; she had more presents than any girl in town had had since Lucy Mackenzie married Otis; she was dying to talk to Barbara.

Magazines, too. Three of the little impressionistic magazines that only used a very special type of poetry; and verse by Barry in all three. One verse was called "Seaweed," and close under the title, in tiny print, was added, "or Barbara, November Fourteenth."

They had been married on November tenth; she remembered his writing this verse a few days later, sprawling at her feet in the sand, down at Abalone Rock. It had been on the day of their first quarrel, oddly enough; a quarrel about that absurd old garrulous ex-convict Slinder, who had hung about so persistently during the beginning of their wedded lives.

Barbara had wanted Slinder banished, and Barry had persisted that common hospitality and brotherhood forbade him to send the derelict away. But the day the poem had been written Slinder had commenced sensationally with an unannounced departure before dawn, taking with him Barry's best sweater, and seven dollars from Barry's pocketbook. So that Slinder had ceased to be a cause for recrimination and had become a household joke instead.

And now here was the little poem, "Seaweed," to bring back to Barbara's mind that happy time when they had moved into the big house and exhausted themselves with cleaning and hauling, and had finally brought what the Athertons called a "teanic" down to the shore, where, muffled to the ears in sweaters, and with teeth that chattered on their coffee cups, they had decided that their first quarrel would be their last, and that they loved each other more than man and woman had ever loved before. Barry, snatching a notebook from his pocket, had sealed this bond with the eight lines called "Seaweed."

"Oh, dear," sighed Barbara, musing upon his excitability, his affectionateness, his general unreasonable difference from anybody else in the world, "I don't know what to do! I suppose the rule about things-in-law staying with one is perfectly true—it *never* works, especially when there isn't any money and people are only really camping, as we are here. Poor Barry—it makes me sick to think how wretched he is, and yet this is one of the cases where I'd lose my self-respect if I gave in."

She lunched alone, "one of those mixy lunches he loves!" mourned Barbara, reading *Barchester Towers* as she munched toast and finished the reheated tomato and creamed onions and fried potatoes. If Barry had come in she would have added poached eggs, to make what he had named "a little mess of whelks." She knew vaguely that the quotation came from Browning, and was conscious that his use of it always meant great approval and felicity.

Two o'clock. Where on earth had he gone! Three o'clock.

Barbara took an old coat, stiff with dried mud and sea water, from a

hook, buttoned it snugly about her, and pulled her tam over her ears. She picked up the rake; that disorderly corner of the paddock might as well be attacked now as any time. Matches—for she would start a slow-burning fire—hatchet, heavy old gloves, rubbers—the ground was like sponge underfoot. She went out into the cool afternoon, closing the door of the warm, orderly kitchen behind her.

"I believe that under this heap there's actually a window, in the side of the chicken house!" she said aloud as she began the assault. For the chicken house was a dark, unsanitary place at present, and as, like everything else on the ranch, it was made of solid adobe, the problem of letting air and light into it had somewhat puzzled her.

She ran about the corner and into the chicken-house door. The warm, odorous darkness within almost blinded her. An old wooden door, cut from a single plank and some six feet square, was leaning against the wall; Barbara could not move it, but she could balance it in a perpendicular position, and peer behind it, to discover to her enormous satisfaction that there actually was a deep window sill there, obscured by cobwebs and closed shutters, and further invalidated by the pyramid of rubbish in the yard outside.

This so heartened her that she quite forgot Barry. She praised Toppy, the suspicious black hen who was nervously setting, opened the nest's wire door that had been triumphantly fashioned by Barbara herself, so that Toppy might take a little air and exercise in the yard, and went back to the rubbish heap with great enthusiasm.

It was composed of planks, empty boxes and barrels, long poles and strips of wire and rope, discarded fencing, old rakes and chains, broken wheels and odd fragments of rusty farm machinery, and a hundred other odds and ends.

With her gloved hands, she courageously seized upon a projecting sharp branch of dead apple tree that had somehow become tangled into the mess, and the snag, unexpectedly loosening, caused her to sit down flatly and suddenly in the mud, the branch in her hands.

She heard her own laugh, exasperated yet gratified, and instantly the sound of another voice, a hoarse, low voice: one she had never heard before.

In the few seconds of panic, she scrambled to her feet and turned toward the sound. And it was Barry, soaked, ashen, disheveled, who stood regarding her like a ghost from the curve of the patio door.

"Babs—for God's sake——"

Her heart thundering with inexpressible fears, she ran to him.

"Barry—my darling—what is it!"

His teeth were chattering; the cheek he bent to her glowing one was as pallid and lifeless as the cheek of a dead man. His arms, as she put her own about him, hung lax, his eyes were lusterless.

"I think I'm sick—I'm going crazy, I guess!" he murmured hoarsely.

Afraid of she knew not what, and yet with her whole being warmed by

being needed, by being reconciled to him again, somehow she got him into the kitchen and on to the couch, and somehow, murmuring as a mother might have murmured, all the time, she took off his soaked garments and got him into bed.

Breathlessly, hardly knowing what to do first, she piled wood on the fire, covered him with blankets, tore off her own rough garments, and slipped into a fresh kitchen dress.

He watched her move about the kitchen, his dark head quiet on the pillow, his teeth still chattering.

"Babs—d-d-do anything, I'll do anything. I've almost g-g-gone crazy today! I've been in hell," he whispered hoarsely.

"Drink this!" It was hot, thin tea, creamed and sugared. She had no stronger stimulant. She propped him tenderly against her own arm while he gratefully sipped it.

"Oh, Barberry Bush—" the beautiful blue eyes, at her elbow, were as beseeching as a child's eyes—"don't ever be angry with me again, I can't b-b-bear it! You're my whole world. D-d-do anything—anything, only don't be angry at me! I wanted to k-k-kill myself this morning—I thought I would kill myself—I can't *stand* it, to be out with you! If I'm wrong and s-s-stupid and selfish, it's only because I adore you so—because I want you all to myself."

She stooped and kissed the cool wave of his hair; instantly her eyes grew anxious and she put the teacup away and investigated his forehead, with her warm fingers, grasped his hands in her own.

"Are you getting warmer?"

"G-g-g-gloriously warm now! I lay d-d-down in the fields, f-f-fool that I was, and just sobbed——"

"You idiot!"

"I know. B-b-but it was w-w-worth it all, to have you take care of me! I love to be babied by you!"

He smiled at her meekly, childishly. And after a few moments she saw that he was sound asleep. The kitchen was warm, quiet; the cat purred.

Barbara sat quietly by the table, sewing a little, reading a little, writing an explanatory note to Amy. The peaceful moments went by, infinitely calm and restful moments, while the fog moved in soft rolling masses over the low ranch house, outside in the spring dusk, and the fire snapped lazily, broke, and snapped again.

Now and then she stepped noiselessly to the stove, to the sink; opened the door without a sound to warn Tomas, who brought the milk, that he must not disturb Barry.

The milk was warm and frothy and coated with specks and bits of straw, in the battered old milking pail. She carried it to the pantry shelf, and strained it into the wide shallow pans, giving the empty pail back to Tomas, and with it the note to Amy.

Alone with Barry again, she cautiously lighted the lamp, sliced a loaf for supper toast, put apples in the oven to bake.

Happier so, oh, infinitely happier than if she had been cold to him, than if she were going away from him tomorrow for the whole day! Barbara's soul was at peace. He needed her and she could care for him. Her bad boy was all her own again.

He opened his eyes bewilderedly, he was burning with fever now.

"Barbara, you're going to Amy's wedding?"

"We'll see how you are in the morning, dear."

"But, Barbara—you've *got* to go! I'm all right, I'm fine—I want you to go." He flung off covers, tossed and sighed. "And tell your father we count on having him here indefinitely," he muttered. "Gosh, I am hot! Whew-w-w!"

"Don't worry about anything now." She opened the door for a moment, it was almost dark outside, and the fog boomed softly in from the dusk. "Drink this," she said, carrying him a cup of hot water.

"It's hot!"

"Yes, but it'll cool you." He seemed to her already cooler as he drifted off to sleep again. She drew the covers lightly over him, stooped to kiss the waves of tumbled hair.

Instantly his fingers caught hers tightly.

"Wonderful to me—wonderful to be sick and have you take care of me!" he murmured thickly.

Barbara propped her book against the sugar-bowl, and ate her supper with only absent-minded glances at plate and spoon. There was a charm about firelight and lamplight, fog and darkness and sea without, cosiness and tea and toast in the kitchen.

Amy was going to be married tomorrow. To be away from the wedding of one's only sister was, of course, no trifle.

But there was something infinitely satisfying about being a married woman, "needed at home." To be managing one's husband and house, cat and chickens—one's life, in short, was soul-filling.

To step softly to the sink, rinse plates, set baked apples on the pantry shelf, estimate firewood and lamp oil, to go about capable and adequate and necessary—there was a sense of real living in this.

Barbara resumed her rocker; the clock struck seven. Eight. Nine. She read *Barchester Towers*.

Now and then Barry roused, wanted a drink, stared bewilderedly about the kitchen, and sighed. When his troubled eyes found hers he would relax again, settle down with a child's weary content.

"Isn't it pretty hot in here, Babs?"

"I'll open the door a minute. But you must keep covered."

"Are you all right, dearest?"

"Fine."

"And do you love me?"

"Dearly."

CHAPTER XII

In all the glory of April blossoms, on a certain shining Saturday afternoon, Link Mackenzie and Marianne Scott drove down to the ranch, to call upon the Du Spains.

The place, as indeed the whole world, was at its loveliest, air, skies, and earth conspiring to intoxicate and enrapture everything that lived. Larks whirled up from the thick roadside grasses, with their delirious liquid notes; gulls peeped and floated over the hacienda, fruit trees were great bouquets of dazzling bloom, and the fields were emerald green.

As Marianne and Link drove slowly along the muddy roads, the air sang, the sea sang, and the very earth seemed singing. Everywhere were color, fragrance, movement, beauty. A colt galloped along the Bettancourt fences, flinging great clods of soft black earth into the air as he went; inside Barry's open gates lay great pools that reflected the lazy movements overhead of cottony clouds—white against blue.

The warm sun shone down on the ranch house; the leaves of eucalyptus and pepper trees were unstirred by wind. Plumes of lilac bowed on delicately foliaged branches at the side door; shadows lay blue in the white peace and order of the patio. There were chickens, ruffling and muttering in the yard, and a lean old cat who lay eyeing the visitors suspiciously, her furry belly to the sun. A calf fretted and cried in a pen; gulls walked on the old tiled roofs.

"Kiss me!" commanded Marianne, embracing the opportunity for an unobserved caress when they got down from the car.

Link caught her jaw in his big hard fingers, pressed his lips against hers. They stood so for a minute, without moving.

Then there was a stir in the kitchen, and Barbara's voice said cheerfully, from the doorway:

"You apparently think I'm rather rotten as a chaperon!"

The two in the patio jumped apart, laughing guiltily, and Marianne ran to Barbara. It was characteristic of a change in their relationship that they kissed each other.

Link had not seen Barbara since some weeks before her marriage. It immediately impressed him that she was altered, was older and yet simpler, oddly charming. He accompanied his handclasp with a bending of his head, and she raised her lips to his, coloring brightly.

"I can kiss the bride, too, can't I?"

"Well, I should think so!"

"Barbara, you're prettier than ever!" Marianne told her.

"There was room!" The other woman answered, laughing.

The three stood smiling at each other in the sun-spattered sweetness of the patio. All the raking and digging, the pruning and cleaning of the winter months had borne their fruit now. On the fountain, dry and mossy

but unencumbered, doves were wheeling and stepping affectedly, the old flags were a marbled pattern of black and white; shadows from the narrow balconies lay clean and blue on soft distempered old adobe walls.

The sun struck upon Barbara's copper hair and turned it to molten gold. She wore a blue linen frock, an old frock, but the dark rich color set off her own blazing brilliance of skin and hair and eyes, and the white collar was fresh and babyish about her soft throat. After the first surprised second, her pleasure in seeing the visitors was delightfully obvious; Link found himself wondering what had caused the first impulse of hesitation, of something like dismay, that had not escaped him as they came in.

They went into the kitchen, shaded and quiet and orderly, with lettuce soaking in a blue bowl of cold clear water, and apple sauce cooling in a heavy old copper pot. Slants and angles of sunshine were tempered to a pleasant twilight here, and in the fireplace was massed a fragrant clump of the wild lilac's smoke-blue blooms, and the delicate enameled pink and white of the pungent wild currant. The stove fire, mere embers now, looked at them with a sleepy red eye.

"This room is like a vault in winter," Barbara admitted animatedly, pushing chairs about, and eager to impress them with the charm of her domain. "Next winter, if we're here, we're going to get a small stove set up in one of the upstairs rooms, and simply move up there. But this is going to be delicious all summer."

Marianne looked exactly as Barbara would have expected her to look; just as she had looked upon that day of her first arrival in Cottonwood, almost a year ago. Her quick, fascinating black eyes shone under a little turban of gold and white, her nails shone, her teeth shone, there was a metallic glitter all about her. The general whiteness of her costume was broken only by two bands of heavy Russian embroidery, in peasant colors, on the sleeves of her linen coat. She looked like a little panther, like something watchful, suspicious, yet eager for the friendship of her kind.

"If you're here next winter," she repeated, studying Barbara fixedly, over her cigarette, "how do you mean? May you be somewhere else?"

"We may be in New York," Barbara said casually.

"Not really!" Marianne exclaimed, curious, dubious.

"Yes. A publishing firm there is bringing out a volume of Barry's poetry," Barbara announced. She had a twinge of conscience; was "volume" too pretentious a word for the slim, simple little sheaf of verse she had persuaded him to gather together and send eastward a few months ago? No, she reassured herself, any book was a volume, and this was actually to be a book.

"You don't mean it!" Marianne said. And for a few minutes she was silent, her eyes narrowed and her lips bitten, her cryptic gaze on space.

"Good for Barry," Link said, in his simple, pleasant voice. "Where is he now, by the way?"

"He went out, just a few minutes before your car turned in our gate.

He's probably going to walk over to Bettancourt's—they had our cows last winter," Barbara explained brightly. She wondered if either hearer suspected that Barry had really escaped from the house a few minutes after Link's car had appeared, rather than before, and that while she was reproaching him with: "Barry, please don't desert me! They won't stay five minutes—we'll have our walk," she had been stripping off a disgracefully spotted and worn apron and jerking the fresh blue linen, with the immaculate white collar, over her head.

Thinner than she used to be, oddly womanly and sweet, there was something about her, some new quality, that puzzled Link. Beside Marianne, with her red lips and slave bracelet, her picked eyebrows and scarlet finger-nails, her jingling beauty case and cigarette box, Barbara looked like a freshly washed, freshly aproned, dewy-eyed child.

"She's a darling!" Link thought, feeling an affectionate, brotherly pride deep in his soul. "There's something—terribly nice about Barbara Atherton."

He laughed whenever she spoke to him, not knowing why. But her very glance made him smile; a shaken sort of smile, and when she spoke he found himself thinking more of the girl than of her words. She wanted him to help her, he did not quite know why, and he was conscious of eagerly wanting to help her.

"Awfully nice to come down here and see you in your own home, married and settled, Barbara!" he said, more than once, groping for some deeper phrase. And of Marianne he would ask eagerly: "Aren't they well fixed here? Isn't it fun to have your own place all to yourselves?"

"I'm so glad you like it!" Barbara would answer fervently. "We do, of course, but then we've sort of worked it out ourselves, and we forget that it's really a sort of glorified camping."

"We're going to stay for lunch," Marianne said, in her lazy, imperious way, "and cook it ourselves."

"If we may," Link added, with a questioning glance.

"Indeed you won't cook it yourselves," Barbara assured them laughingly, after the usual uneasy second of misgiving about Barry's attitude. "A nice kitchen I'd have to clean up if you did anything like that! But *I'll* cook it—look here!"

She uncovered an enormous jar of Spanish pottery, at one side of the range, and took from it a ladleful of a dark red mixture, extending the spoon for Marianne and then Link to taste.

"Did you ever taste anything so glorious as that! I found jars and jars of pickled tomatoes, all coated with mothwing, in the cellar, and bags of onions, and some roots of Chinese ginger, and we had dry peppers, of course—every peg in the house had a few hanging from it! And I invented this sauce for omelettes and macaroni and so on. I'll give you either macaroni or omelette for lunch, with this *sauce barbare,* as Barry calls it."

"Oh, heavenly!" Marianne said. Link was watching Barbara with a

sort of indulgent, amused admiration. She tasted the sauce herself, frowned.

"Link, you wouldn't know if that needed more pepper? I know Marianne wouldn't," she said, with a child's anxious sweetness. And, glancing up, she saw that he was laughing at her, and laughed herself. "It's only twelve o'clock," she told them; "do let's walk down to the shore before lunch! And tell me about everybody and everything."

"You weren't at Amy's wedding, Barbara?" Link asked, as they skirted the stiff black mud of the old cow paddock and took a dipping little sandy lane toward the beach. The warm sun beat down on them, the blue air sang with happy spring sounds, and a crippled old plum tree, bending its branches to the green grass, was as dazzling white as a great popcorn ball against a background of blue sea.

"No—it broke my heart, of course. But Barry was frightfully ill, you know. You weren't there, Link?"

"No, nobody but your father and two or three others—the Duffys and their cousins, I think."

"They came down here that same day, right after the ceremony, on their way to Los Angeles for their honeymoon," Barbara said. "It was the divinest day we ever had, I think, and old Amy did look so pretty and seemed to be so happy! Barry was much better; he got up on Sunday, in fact, and we kept my father here for three days. He and Barry became the greatest chums, and how they ate!—like two boys. We wanted to keep him longer, but the old darling has signed up for a lecture tour, seventeen lectures in seventeen towns in seven weeks—and about ten dollars clear of expenses!—isn't that a programme? So he had to go. The last night he was here we brought our supper down to the beach——"

She picked up a grass-crusted clod of dark earth, and hurled it at a staring red cow, in the most matter-of-fact way in the world.

"That cow doesn't belong here; that isn't one of our cows," she explained. "There's a quicksand where the creek goes into the ocean, and they get stuck there and give us the most awful trouble, with planks and ropes, getting them out!"

"It must be lots of fun, roaming about here with a poet husband to make a joke and a picnic of everything," Marianne commented suddenly.

Barbara's eyes met Link's for the fraction of a second; a mild look, devoid of any significance, gone almost before it reached him. Yet it gave him a vague sense of wonder again. For what was she asking?

"It *is* fun!" she agreed, smiling.

"I suppose you have meals at any old time, and never say a sensible word," Marianne suggested, and there was almost a trace of envy in her voice.

"Almost!" Barbara agreed again, again smiling.

As a matter of fact, her poet was scrupulously punctual about meal times and domestic regularity. But this was a quality almost impossible to

reconcile with any theory of Barry's character. Barbara had heard him spout socialism and the age-old slavery of women and free love a hundred times in the old days, and she was still amazed to find him extremely conventional, detesting even an independent opinion in women, detesting much more their interest in politics or cigarettes, liking them to believe in the dependence, the domesticity, and the God he affected to despise.

But she couldn't tell Marianne that. And so she walked along between Marianne and Link composedly, smiling, and Link, studying her, marveled at the change in her more and more.

Barry came abruptly to the patio just before two o'clock. He exchanged a quick angry look with Barbara, seeing the table set in the court for four; he welcomed Link and Marianne with a sort of stiff, resentful civility. But as the two men sat awaiting the meal and chatting about mutual interests in Cottonwood, the elder saw that his host's mood was changing: Barry was beginning to enjoy himself.

Presently they were all laughing without restraint, as Barbara recounted some of the absurd experiences of their early married days, and Link and Marianne displayed their quite frank envy of these younger persons who had found their Paradise so easily. And then Barbara put the great Canton platter of smoking macaroni on the table, and the hot buttered French bread, and jam, and a bowl of salad that smelled faintly of chives, and still more faintly of garlic, and glinted with green olive oil. The glorious odor of coffee went straight up into the blue air where gulls were circling, and pigeons making short flights, and the golden cream was clotted solid in the little pitcher.

"Never—never in my life," said Marianne faintly, after awhile, "have I eaten such food or so much of it!"

"Barbara," Link remarked solemnly, pushing back his chair and drawing a deep, grateful breath, "that was a *meal.*"

Barry's pleasure in his wife's cleverness and capability, his proud complacence in the charm and comfort he and she had managed to wrest from the ruined old hacienda, metamorphosed him into his sunniest mood. Loitering at the table, with the dim grays and browns and creams of the old plaster wall of the patio for a background, and the narrow arched gate, set open upon rusty iron hinges, framing a blue distance of sky and sea, his beauty was so startling that even Link saw it clearly, as if for the first time, and read a reflection of his appreciation in the girls' eyes.

Barry's dark blue shirt, a laborer's shirt, was open at the throat, its sleeves were rolled about the elbow, and the splendid brown modeling of his arms and the hard straight column of his neck were bared. The rich mop of his black hair was carelessly pushed back from his low, broad forehead. The warmth of the spring day, and the exertions he had recently made with firewood and chairs, had brought a flush to the smooth ivory skin, and curled tiny feathers of black against his low forehead. His moody blue eyes, smiling and darkening a hundred times in a minute, finding Barbara's serene answering glance before he spoke, and in con-

firmation of everything he said, were oddly contradicted, in their childish puzzlement and innocence, by the firm line of the mouth and jaw.

Conciliatory. Link Mackenzie suddenly found the word, and knew that it fitted her. Conciliatory, that was what her attitude was, already, in relation to Barry, although they had been married so short a time and she was so young. She wanted him to be happy and she didn't know quite how to make him so.

Back of all this pretty new gravity of hers, this graceful, simple hospitality in circumstances so obviously straitened and limited, lay the cloud of his whim, and her eagerness to discern it, and satisfy it.

The strangeness of young marriage impressed Link, as they talked and laughed over the table, while the golden afternoon slipped by; the miracle of a man and a woman, singled off from the rest of their kind, from the old ways and faces and familiar rooms.

Barbara Atherton's die was cast. She was Barry du Spain's wife. Her life now was beside him, to keep him happy if she could, to share his fame and prosperity if he were to win them, and, if not, to bring what courage and vision she might to her part in his failure.

They had already had almost six months of it; they had become accustomed to each other's nearness and voices; each other's weakness and strength. They had shared walks, moods, meals, and plans for almost two hundred days and nights.

Link roused himself from deep contemplation. Barbara was talking, Barry watching her with burning, adoring eyes. Marianne, her little beauty case open in her hand, her glance roving regularly from Barbara's face to the tiny reflection of her own, wore an odd expression, an expression strangely compounded of vague uneasiness and vaguer envy.

"It seems extraordinary," Marianne presently commented, "that a kid like you—" her smiling look for Barry was flattering if her term was not —"that a kid like you can make himself felt in a city like New York, packed with poets and writers and dramatists, and that you may really go on there."

"If I finish my *Napoleon Third,* and *if* it's taken——" Barry muttered, frowning, staring into space, and absorbed in some consideration of his own.

"If——!" Barbara echoed promptly. "Shame on you!"

"Well, *when,*" Barry amended, grinning.

"Fun," Marianne mused. "How you'll love it! Getting there some winter afternoon, when all the taxi lights are streaming up the Avenue, and the shop windows are filled with adorable hats and frocks——"

"And the chestnut peddlers, under the elevated trains," Barry added.

The girl turned to him in surprise:

"Do you know New York?"

"Oh, yes, I lived there for two years."

"I didn't know that!" Marianne commented, struck.

"Yes, when I was a boy, about fourteen, my mother went on there, to

stay with my grandmother, the same grandmother who left me this place. I know Greenwich Village," Barry went on. "And that's where Babs and I would go."

Barbara enthusiastically contributed her own theories about life in the Eastern capital, attics, tramps in the snow, secondhand bookshops, free concerts. Barry knew restaurants where all Bohemia congregated: "The Tin Coffee-Pot," "The Bug House," "The Twin Sisters." Downstairs places, stenciled in startling poster colors, with bare tables and thick china. Link said that he had never been in New York; certainly would like to go, some day.

But Marianne sat silent, her bright eyes thoughtful, her lower lip lightly caught in her teeth, her look far beyond them all, fixed on space.

"Well, are we going to tell them, Link?" Marianne spoke suddenly with no reference to the preceding conversation.

Barbara's glance flew to Link, and she knew instantly, with an odd little sinking at her heart, what they had to tell. Link flushed quickly and sent a dubious, almost disapproving glance to Marianne.

"Would you?" he asked, in an undertone.

"Of course you would!" said Barbara's warm, heartening voice encouragingly. And she laid her hand quietly for a moment on his. "You must tell *us*." She smiled at him reproachfully.

Marianne was sitting back, scowling.

"I don't exactly—*like*—your hesitation, my friend," she drawled, her half-closed eyes fixed upon Link.

"I didn't hesitate, dear; don't be silly!" he answered briefly, with an uncomfortable suggestion of a smile. "I just wondered——"

Barbara's joyous enthusiasm filled the awkward little space. She jumped from her seat and went around the table to Marianne and kissed her, and Barry shook Link's hand, a broad grin on his face.

"Of course, I suspected!" exclaimed Barbara. "Everyone does. But it is fun to really know!"

And presently, in a pause in the general babel, she could ask:

"But tell us your plans. When is the wedding to be?"

"September," Link said promptly. Barbara looked her surprise.

"September? Isn't that a long way off?"

"Well, we might as well tell them the whole story, mightn't we, Link?" Marianne said then, impulsively. And putting her two slender elbows on the table, and glancing from one expectant face to the other, she began: "You see, I did a very naughty thing when I first came to Cottonwood last year," she confessed. "I was really—Mrs. Scott, but I was so depressed and discouraged and down and out generally that I thought that it would be simpler, just for a little while, to be Miss. I wanted to be quiet! I wanted to be let alone!"

Barbara, astonished, glanced at Link, who was smiling indulgently at Marianne. She could not remember any noticeable depression, or any obvious desire for obscurity and quiet on Marianne's part upon her

arrival in Cottonwood. She remembered flirting and dancing, and the Casino, and the instant revival of a long-dead gaiety and hospitality, not only in the Wilson house but in the whole neighborhood. A curious little change of feeling began to shake some of the oldest and most solid foundations in her heart. The Wilsons—the Mackenzies—the great people at Cottonwood jolted, twisted, refitted themselves into her scheme. They were just—persons, men and women, after all. And Link Mackenzie's girl, the girl who would be the social leader of the town some day, was something—just a hint—less than she had seemed.

"I left my husband just a year ago," continued Marianne simply. "I've told Link all about it—I've told Link that no self-respecting woman could possibly have lived with Royal Scott. For three years—the best years of my life—I did my best. It was a silly marriage to begin with, and my own family was dead against it, but he had money and he was a great sport, and he dazzled me—little fool that I was! We lived in an apartment for awhile, and then in a hotel, and then he got running around with other women, and I just couldn't stand it. Cry? I almost cried my eyes out—I was heartbroken. So finally I went home to my mother, and she suggested that I come out here and visit Inez and Aunt Madge."

"You divorced him?" Barbara asked, in the pause. She had glanced at Link's fine, sunburned, ugly, yet oddly likeable and impressive face. But Link, flushed, and with an expression just a little uncomfortable in his eyes, had fixed his gaze steadily upon Marianne. One of his big hands he had laid on hers, on the table.

"No, I couldn't, there. Royal," Marianne explained scornfully, "was always very careful to give me no grounds for *that*. No, I just left him, and came West. Where he is, or what he's doing, I haven't the faintest idea. Nor do I care! I filed my suit in San Francisco, and I get my decree on the first of next September."

"So that she's had a pretty rotten time of it," Link added, his look demanding their sympathy.

"Awful!" Marianne said, with a shudder. "What women have to go through!" she added, shaking her head. "But, anyway, that's the story. That's why we have to wait until September," she said, warming, "that's why Link's father has threatened to throw him out of the business and out of the house——"

Her voice rose impatiently.

"Now, now, now, what do we care?" Link soothed her.

"Well, I *do* care, Link!" she answered agitatedly. "I *do* care. I think he's a mean old devil, and I don't care who knows it! *You* built up that business, you are the real brains of the firm, you put your whole life into it, and he has no right to leave everything to your sisters—*no* father has any such right."

"Oh, come—come—come!" Link protested, uncomfortable that Barbara and Barry should see her so excited. And Barbara perceived that

they had been over this ground many times before. "He'll forgive us, some day, and all this will be forgotten."

"He won't forgive *me!*" Marianne persisted viciously, and to Barbara's surprise she saw that the older girl was actually in angry tears. "For I'll never speak to him again, the close-fisted old tightwad."

Honestly shocked, Barbara glanced quickly at Link. But Link was indulgently, if also somewhat uneasily, smiling. His feeling for Marianne, Barbara realized, had affected his vision of anything Marianne might say or do.

"Isn't she a spitfire?" he asked, laughing. And patting her hand and speaking as if to a furious child, he said to Marianne: "Ah, pussy, don't get worked up! You know you don't mean that!"

Marianne looked at him, cooling visibly, and beginning to pout.

"Well, it's only because he's so mean to you, Honeyboy," she reminded him, softening.

"Some champion, isn't she?" Link asked, looking at Barbara.

"No, but he's the most wonderful boy in the world, and his little girl is crazy 'bout him," Marianne went on, supposedly to the others, but really only to Link, who looked foolish, pleased, and self-conscious at the same time.

"And *that*—" said Barbara to Barry, when in the mellow lingering twilight they were alone again, and were attacking the accumulated dishes and duties attendant upon a lazy, hospitable day—"*that*—save that butter, Barry, it's perfectly good!—beats any mushy-gushy honeymoon talk you and *I* ever attempted! That 'Honeyboy' stuff! Every time she said it, I simply broke out in gooseflesh."

"I can't see why you criticize her—she seemed to me simple and nice and affectionate today," Barry reproached her, stiffly and loftily.

Barbara, carefully storing bread and cream, changed her attack.

"You can see that it makes Major Mackenzie wild," she said. "In the first place, he belongs to the generation that loathes divorce; and in the second place, you can imagine what a buzz there'll be when the town gets on to the whole thing!"

"You haven't said yet," Barry began in a hurt tone, "that you think I was pretty decent to them, considering how I *despise* unexpected visitors, and that the instant you saw them you threw all our plans overboard. It didn't matter to *you* that you'd promised to go down to the willows for lunch!"

"Well, I do think you were very nice, and I certainly was proud of the place, and the lunch, and the way you behaved, and everything!" Barbara assured him pacifically.

"Yes, but you didn't *say* so!"

"Well, I say so now."

"And last month, when I was so decent to your father, and put myself out to give him a nice visit——"

"But darling—Barry, hand me that bowl, will you?—but darling,"

reasoned Barbara, pouring two pans of milk together, and holding each in turn under the running hot water, "I told you a thousand times that I thought you were an angel to my father."

"You did when I *asked* you. I wish to God," Barry grieved, "that you you had *some* husbands! I try to do everything——"

Barbara glanced at him over her shoulder and was touched to see that he was dutifully cutting old potatoes, lettuce leaves, crusts of bread, into the pot that would simmer, on the back of the stove, with the chickens' breakfast for tomorrow.

She went over to him and perched on the arm of his chair and said peremptorily and whimsically:

"Kiss me and stop your nonsense! I think you're the most wonderful person alive. You were an angel today."

Barry's sulky face brightened and he tightened a big arm about her waist and drew down her cheek for violent kisses.

"Barberry Bush, there's nobody like you in the world! You're wonderful. I was so proud of you today, and the lunch and the place. I'll bet it knocked their eyes out. You looked prettier—sitting there with your red hair and your blue apron . . ."

There was a long interval of this. Then Barbara could resume:

"Don't you think it was a rather rotten thing for any woman to do, come into a community and call herself 'Miss,' when she really was married?"

"Rotten. But then she *is* rotten," Barry said frankly.

"Oh, do you think so?" Barbara was pleasantly surprised.

"Certainly she is. It would take an innocent boob like Link Mackenzie not to see it!" Barry said scornfully, in his man-of-the-world tone. "She'll lead him a dance before she's through with him, believe you me."

"Barry, don't you think they'll be happy?"

"Happy? With that near-Cleopatra reddening her lips while they are being married, and vamping the clergyman at the same time——"

Barbara's delicious wild laugh rang out, and she leaned, in a very gale of mirth, upon the broom with which she was brushing the wide flags of the patio. The last of the sunlight was lingering on the spring grass, and the bowing plumes of the lilacs, and the blossoming white popcorn ball of the plum tree. A dreamy radiance, full of the promise of summer, of warm moonlights and shining, cloudless days, lay over the world.

"Kind of pitiful, his breaking with his father, Barberry," Barry commented.

"Terrible, really. It's awful, to me, to see Link Mackenzie, who was always so cool and cheerful, excited and thin and so queer and quiet!" Barbara commented. "He seems a changed person. Why, Link Mackenzie would have shot anyone who called his father a close-fisted old tightwad a few years ago. He just seems mesmerized by her. He doesn't seem so terribly happy, to me."

"If old Major Tom really kicks him out," Barry reflected, jamming

the patio door on the swollen earth, and freeing it, and jamming it shut again, "they'll be worse off than we are!"

"Well, really, they will."

And Barbara, finishing her sweeping in the dusk, had an oddly satisfied feeling, only half realized and not at all understood. Life was evening the scores, after all. She—Barry's wife—was responsible, burdened, and puzzled enough, sometimes, in the new duties that the new state demanded. But she was farther along the road than Link, somehow; she felt nearer Link than she ever had felt in her life before, better able to understand him.

He and Marianne had actually envied her and Barry today; envied them their youth and freedom to marry, their isolation from criticizing eyes, their love and laughter, Barry's genius and the beginnings of success, Barbara's capability, and the comfort and picturesqueness of their gipsy home.

More than that, Barbara felt dimly that Link had envied her the bright integrity, valueless through all his honorable, open boyhood, but strangely and newly appreciated now, when there had come a shadow on the name of the woman he loved, and when between his father and himself there was widening daily a chasm of distrust and hostility.

Marianne Scott a divorced woman! Not even that, yet: she was a woman who would attract another man even while tied to her husband. When Cottonwood knew that, a tidbit of gossip affecting the most prominent families in town, there would be talking!

"Barry, was there ever anything sweeter in this life than a spring sunset? These are the days to live for—this makes all the long waiting through the winter worth while!"

"I don't see where you get your energy, my good woman. I ache from head to foot!"

"That's just spring fever, that yawny, stretchy feeling. Look at our patio—isn't it beautiful, all swept and nice again? Barry, let's walk down to Abalone Rock and get the last of this particular day!"

"Well, wait—I've got a poem for you, I must have written it days ago, but I found it in my jacket pocket today."

She loitered in the arch of the patio doorway, looking out across the paddock and strip of orchard that lay between them and the sea. The chickens had all gone to bed now, the barnyard was very still; the walls and fences were painted with pink sunshine, in strips and bars. And in the west the sky was reddened, and the sinking sun was framing little fleets of clouds with aureoles of pale opal color.

Scent of lilac and acacia and turned earth and grass in the still soft air; Barry's strong fingers holding hers as they walked together down to the shore. There was a sort of languid sweetness in the twilight, after the long, warm, enervating day.

They walked past the blossoming plum tree, down a sunken lane, and came out on the cliff, opposite Abalone Rock. The bigness and blackness

of it stood up boldly against the sunset, the seas volleyed and charged and surged against it, brimmed solemnly and evenly over the filled pools in the rocks, and withdrew, like a sweeping of satiny skirts, back to the measureless, restless levels of the dim wide ocean again.

The sun was gone now, but there was a clear, shadowless light upon the sea; water rocked and rippled ceaselessly; the tide was in. It spilled itself in fingers of snowy foam where the jagged teeth of a natural causeway of slippery, weed-covered rocks led out to the big sentinel outpost. Barbara, seated in the snug hold of her favorite boulders on the shore, looked at it with a fearful fascination. Not much chance for one—if ever one stumbled and fell into the rushing millrace of angry water under Abalone Rock.

"Remember you walked over to Tomas's house last week and left me a note?" Barry, ready to read his poem, was demanding eagerly.

"The day it poured so!"

"Yep. Well, this is what I wrote." And straining his eyes to see in the gloom, he read:

" 'They say that Hak'kei once so painted night
His canvas, being unrolled, filled the room
With moonshine, even though, in morning light,
The Emperor's cherry orchards were in bloom.

" 'So with your letter. Opened in the gray
Of tempest, under somber winter skies,
It brought your laughter to my lonely day,
And sudden sunshine seemed to blind my eyes.' "

She did not speak. But she stretched her fingers to him and linked them tightly in his own; in the last waning light he could catch the flash of her blue eyes, and he saw that they were wet.

"I went over that rainy day," she said, after a long silence, "to ask Tomas's wife some questions."

For a few moments Barry made no comment. Then he said:

"What on earth about?"

Again Barbara was silent, and her fingers tightened in his.

"Marianne guessed it right away," she presently offered in a rather faint voice.

Barry sat up, staring at her incredulously through the gathering shadows.

"I don't believe it!" he ejaculated.

Barbara said nothing. But she got to her feet and turned her back toward the sea that was lead-color now, and began to mount the cliff path.

Instantly he was beside her, extending a hand for her support.

"What makes you so sure?" he said.

Barbara was conscious of a desolated desire for tears. But she controlled it and walked on, Barry's fingers tightly supporting her elbow now.

"Wouldn't you—wouldn't you be glad?" she asked guardedly, when they were at the patio archway.

She had been afraid he would fail her, and that she would have to remember always that, at this moment, he had failed her. But it was in a boyish tone of sympathy and wonder that he said mildly:

"Why, I—I would if you would, Barberry Bush!"

Barbara, with a sound between a laugh and a cry, put her arms about his neck, and her face down against his shoulder. It was delicious to feel his grip holding her tight; she felt oddly tired and cold and weak, and for a long time she clung to him blindly, and neither spoke.

Then they went into the kitchen and lighted the fire, for the evening was suddenly chilly, and a wind had sprung up from nowhere and was singing on the roof. Presently Barry had crackers and milk and a cigarette, and Barbara had thin tea and thin toast, both smoking hot, and she thought that she had never loved him so much, or the hacienda so well, or been so happy about anything as she was about the fact that the news had been told and he had taken it gently and kindly and without regret.

It had been fun having Link and Marianne here today, Barbara thought, still musing interestedly upon their problem, and the thought of old Major Mackenzie's anger and Marianne's divorce. They had liked her Spanish sauce, they had enjoyed their meal, and how beautiful the ranch had looked in spring sunshine, with the fruit trees one mass of bloom against a soft blue sky!

"See how you like this, Barberry Bush!"

It was Barry, at the center table, with his pencils and paper. She roused herself from a half doze, blinked in the light.

"Listen, see how you like this start!" he said. He began to read scratched and altered lines:

" 'We spoke your name in the dusk tonight,
The sea gulls had gone to bed,
And the waves were leaden in closing light,
And the west was painted red.
We talked about you beside the sea,
In the world you do not know,
But that you shall know——' "

He stopped, frowned. "There's something wrong here," he said darkly, scowling at his paper. And he began to scribble again.

Barbara fell again to musing. The mystery of it enfolded her like a garment, seemed to dull her senses. The life of a child, coming toward the old world. A child, bound whether he liked it or not, for the old hacienda, and for life with herself and Barry . . .

She felt frightened at the enormousness of it, somehow. She stirred stiffly, thought she would go to bed.

But Barry was deep in dreams. He had a new subject now; he was busy with it, and he was happy.

CHAPTER XIII

The Mackenzie children, Link, Lucy, and Margaret, had been motherless since Link's eighth birthday. Of them only Link remembered his pretty mother, giving them all ice cream in the grape arbor on hot afternoons, and pretending at breakfast to taste baby Margaret's cream of wheat, with great manifestations of enthusiasm.

"M'm'm! What *delicious* podgy," she would say. And Link would quite seriously taste his own, expecting it to be extraordinarily good after this description.

His grandmother, an invalid for years, had lived until some time after his mother's death; Link had been playing with a mechanical toy in his grandmother's room on the afternoon his mother died. There had been talk, in the family, of a new baby sister or brother, for some weeks previously, but, boy-like, he had paid small attention to it. It had been raining, raining, raining, and Link, running his trains along a window sill, had stopped to look down and see Dr Bonner's muddy phaeton, sluicing water, parked in the side yard.

When his father came upstairs, he did not stop playing. He did not notice his father at all until he heard a hard, grinding, agonized voice that was still his grandmother's say, "Oh, merciful and heavenly Father, protect us!"

Then Link went slowly over to where his father was sitting, and stood puzzled and troubled beside him, now and then jerking his head up, as the weight of his father's arm about him and the heaviness of his father's head on his shoulder drew him down, to wipe awkwardly the man's tears from his own face, with the back of his free hand.

After that, he was his Dad's boy; indeed, Major Tom Mackenzie, in a troubled, tender, clumsy way, had lived only for his children since then. The girls he would have spoiled, if little Lucy had not been the busy, practical, capable type of little girl who promptly began to mother him, and her sister, too, and utterly refused to be spoiled. Link he made his companion and confidant.

It was easy for Link to grow to boyhood sweet, good, and sensible, because everyone liked him, everyone expected great things of his father's son, and the entire social fabric of Cottonwood was such that, between the richest boy in town, who was indisputably Link, and the poorest, there was not much to choose, in actual dressing and eating, amusements and employments, after all.

Link grew grimy and rumpled over long division and geography, as

the others did; he had the gang in his backyard afternoons, unless they all went to swim on the shore, or were allowed by special privilege the ecstatic freedom of Fatto's father's lumber yard, or Jim Stephenson's mother's hotel.

The Mackenzie children had a pony cart one year, sent them by an aunt in the East, but it was not a success. Link and Lucy would gladly abandon it at any moment, to join their friends on a hay wagon, or nip rides on anything from the station bus to the hearse, and Margaret, left lonely in the pony cart with her nurse, would scream herself into spasms at being deserted.

So the pony grew fat and lazy in a paddock, and the cart was stored in one of the empty barns, and as both Fatto and Harry Poett somehow became possessed of motor cars at about sixteen, and Jim and a few of the other boys were skidding about town in disreputable cars even before this, and as Link's father, on principle, would not permit him to own one until his eighteenth birthday, no invidious distinction in his favor was felt by anyone, much less himself, in this as in other matters.

Under the circumstances, he and his group developed slowly, as it was natural that they should develop. The neighboring college of St Whitsun was a small, friendly, well-endowed institution, where no disturbing new social ideals were apt to find a footing. Link and his girl friends played about cheerfully through the late teens, sharing dances and sodas and box lunches in their young manhood and womanhood just as they had in the seventh grade, occupied with so much tennis, croquet, swimming, so many walks, rides, and camping trips, such feverish periods of theatricals and minstrel shows, such rarebits, candy-pulls, and barbecues as might well delay the development of those sex instincts and spoiled appetites that a more crowded, effete, and extravagant life inevitably produces.

All this until Marianne came: It was not long before her coming that Link, enjoying the absorbing subject but somewhat puzzled, had sometimes quite frankly told this girl or that in his own group that he had never been in love. How did he know he hadn't? Well, darn it, you always did know that, didn't you? You knew that you were missing something.

Sure, he had said, with his friendly, likeable, homely grin, he would like to be in love. He wasn't trying to keep out of it; he just guessed he was an arrested development. Lucy and Otis, now, it was enough to make you envious to see what a kick they got out of it!

And suddenly, there had come to him several days of thinking, strangely and confusedly, of Barbara Atherton. It had almost made Link laugh to see how entirely unconscious Barbara was of any change in his attitude. But she was certainly the brightest and nicest of all the girls, spontaneous and fresh, unusually, arrestingly pretty, and Link had suddenly felt, quite dispassionately, that he wanted to marry Barbara. Nothing could be more suitable, everyone would be delighted, and all the details of the wedding and the bringing home of his spirited wife—

"Gosh, she'd be my wife!" Link had thought innocently—would be "fun."

He had rather haunted her for a day or two, self-conscious, awkward and excited, eager to break through his own troublesome limitations of uncertainty and constraint, and eager to arouse in her the responsive ardor that should carry them quickly and serenely into harbor. It would be the greatest "fun" in the world to be engaged to Barbara Atherton and have all the others congratulating them and giving them parties, Link had thought, with a queer, inexplicable flutter at his heart that had warned him that his imagination had not even begun to grasp the extent of the "fun."

But Barbara had not been able to met him halfway. She had been puzzled, amused, a little angry, and a little disgusted by his overtures. At twenty-five, little as he knew of women, Link had known that the sleeping fires in Barbara had not been lighted by his attempted clumsy kisses, by his incoherent reproach, by his effort to persuade her that there was an enchanting country close beside her, a country of moonlight and whispers, stolen kisses and ecstatic vows, and that he was eager to find it and have her find it.

And turning disappointed from Barbara, he had found Marianne at his elbow.

Marianne was twenty-eight, three years older than he. She had told him at first that she was twenty-four, and Link had of course believed her. Not that it mattered, either way, very much.

When a telegram from her stepmother had come on her birthday, with the damning word "twenty-eighth" included in the message, his faint feeling of hurt and surprise that she should want to deceive him had made Link unhappy. But not for long.

Marianne knew all the rules of the oldest game in the world and how to break them. She had a beautiful, slim, boneless little body, beautiful tawny hands, and strange almond eyes, drawn up at the outer corner just a hint, like a Chinese girl's eyes.

In everything, she was the embodiment of feminine lure. Her hair was silky to touch, and delicately fragrant to smell. Her voice was low, her Oriental eyes were full of subtle flatteries. Her garments embraced her, in every variation of silky line and seductive curve; her stockings were transparent, her ridiculously small feet set off by a bewildering variety of buckles, bows, straps, and rosettes.

On the bathing beach she looked like a barearmed, bareheaded, barelegged pixie, smiling up with mysterious significance from under a barbaric sweep of bandanna. On the tennis court she had a red cap jerked down over one eye, and a little scarlet coat, in dangling soft panels of silk, set off her brief white skirt.

But the house was Marianne's hunting ground, cave, and setting. In the morning she fairly dripped Irish lace and peach satin ribbons cunningly backed with lemon. And she could quite absent-mindedly and impulsively

fly downstairs in these intimate costumes, too, and eagerly greet Link Mackenzie, if Link happened to stop with a message, at the French windows that gave on the side lawn.

Under these circumstances, she was always deliciously confused, wrapping her insufficient draperies about her, doubling herself modestly into a porch chair, and scrupulously jerking down a scrap of lace to cover her bare ankles, whenever his eyes found them. Link had not known Marianne two weeks before he had had glimpses of her in her silk pajamas, with a saucy little silk handkerchief sticking out of the breast pocket, had seen her drying her freshly washed hair, and had even seen her in bed.

On the last occasion she had summoned him imperiously to the room where she and Inez were chatting over breakfast trays. Just one teeny second, she had pleaded, tucking the pink satin coverlet about her. Aunt Madge would kill her, of course, but Link *must* come in and let her see his face while she told him about Amy Atherton's engagement to that fuddidud Duffy boy who always smelled of ether!

And she had looked at him sidewise, with infinite provocation dancing in her eyes, under the disordered fluff of her dark hair.

"Link, do you feel very wicked, talking to us up here?"

"Oh, on the contrary."

Gales of laughter from the girls, and then Marianne, drawing her mouth down childishly and innocently, had said:

"Because you see I had to see you, *didn't* I, Link?"

"I'll say you did!"

"Aunt Madge," Marianne had continued, as the somewhat scandalized Mrs Wilson had come in, eyebrows raised, "I really know I'm very naughty, and I really know I'll go to hell, and I really won't never, ever do it again—but I had to talk to Link, and I'm sorry!"

And she had bowed her black mop upon her raised knees, and hugged them with her round, slim arms, and abased herself penitently.

Everyone knew she wasn't sorry, everyone knew she knew better, yet it was somehow charming to them all to pretend that Marianne was just a mischievous, impish, irrepressible eight-year-old, and to scold her as one.

Aunt Madge scolded happily, half heartedly; she liked the atmosphere that Marianne brought to the house. It wasn't exactly conventional, but then youngsters did have such a good time in these days, argued fat Mrs Wilson, and somehow you couldn't stop them. Marianne's presence meant, too, that Inez had plenty of excitement and company, and was much less bitter and discontented than she had been last year. And finally, if that reckless little monkey Marianne, who seemed to have a positively uncanny knowledge of what drew men to women, really did catch Link Mackenzie, who was quite the richest and most prominent, as well as the nicest boy in town—well, nobody would have any criticism to make of Marianne after *that!*

The thought of the bedroom, in the summer morning, with its light tempered by awninged windows, and with the girls all lace and perfume and pink ribbons, over their silver coffee-pot and hot rolls, stayed with Link all day. How cunning she had looked as she tipped her little black head to one side, and asked, so naughtily:

"You see I did have to see you, *didn't* I, Link?"

He would walk through the summer darkness of the big gardens after dinner, to see her again. It was always a thrilling experience, going to find Marianne. Little, soft, perfumed, eager thing, she did not resist his kisses and his arms. With consummate ease she managed that they should have a few minutes alone together almost every night, before the fire, or that he should be the squire selected to drive her to a dance or theater, or that Aunt Madge should consent to their walking out as far as the garage wall together, just to look at the moon.

Every waking minute of Link's day was consumed with the burning thought of her. Her flatteries, her soft kisses, her little fingers as soft and pulpy as a crushed poppy in his; these things devoured him. By autumn he was pleading with her to become his wife, begging her not to keep him waiting too long.

It was then, one cold evening when the lights in the sitting room were turned low, and when the voices of some older folk, over the card table in the adjoining room, were acting as a sort of chaperon, that she climbed into his arms, and lay there, like a quiet, grieved child, and confessed to him, with many a pause for kisses, and many a pleading little pressure of her fingers, that she was really another man's wife.

The revelation, with all that it involved, had staggered him for awhile. His passion for her, always a fire, had turned to an agony, and the days that the thought of her had made quivering and bright with strange, formless dreams, were dark with jealousy and pain.

His father, whose quiet acquiescence and consent to his attachment Link had construed into enthusiasm and sympathy, was adamant here. What kind of a woman was this, he had demanded harshly, who could win the love of another man while all the laws of honor and decency held her to the one?

But by this time Link's fury of loyalty to her had risen to the point where it could carry him through any crisis. The bitter breach with his father had been created without any violence, after all; the two men, alike in a sort of homely ruggedness, alike in their firmly jawed, sun-burned faces whose very ugliness was attractive, had exchanged no unnecessary words.

"You mustn't marry her, Link. She isn't your kind."

"I shall marry her."

"Not as my son, you won't." It had been said dispassionately and quietly, almost absent-mindedly, and the older man, saying it, had stared thoughtfully out of the office window.

"That's up to you."

And then life was going on just as usual, father and son coming and going in the big Mackenzie mansion, speaking to each other, civil, considerate, well controlled. Margaret was away at school, and Inez Wilson ill; Marianne Scott was never invited to the house any more; everything seemed rather quiet and flat, after the joyous excitement that had reigned all summer. But T. L. Mackenzie, senior, read his magazines and newspapers, went off for his golf or riding, and gave to his business the steady attention he had given it all his life, and T. L., junior, also pursued the usual tenor of his way, stopping in at the Wilson house on his way downtown every morning, and going there for dinner, or immediately after dinner, almost every night.

If Link's father thought of the past years, when the clumsy, long-legged boy had been his companion in golf games and fishing trips, when his greatest delight had been to wander out to the side garden on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon and watch the youngsters at their tennis or croquet, when his boy had made him laugh over every breakfast table, and had won him to animated discussion of political or social issues at almost every dinner hour, he gave no sign. If he remembered the still earlier days, the days when Link had grinned at him with two big front teeth missing, with the freckles actually confluent upon his high, boyish cheek bones, the days when the elder Margaret had been beside him and Lucy and little Margaret had worn white dresses just alike, when all the world had seemed as sweet a place as was the Mackenzie orchard, with the neighborhood children playing under the trees, he suppressed the thought. The children were grown now, and the boy had made his choice of a mate.

Link remembered nothing. Everything in his life, before the advent of Marianne, was a negligible blank. Only Marianne, and her low, laughing voice, and her soft fragrant mouth, existed now.

It was a bitter thought that another man had called her wife, that she had loved and kissed before. But, after the first pang and shock, it had only made him love her the more. Sensitive, exquisite little Marianne at the mercy of a brute! Link burned to have her free, to be able himself to comfort and console her and make her forget that there was unhappiness in the world.

But he was not the first ardent lover who was to find the law's delays sickening and discouraging. Try as he might, he could not listen to her quite simple explanation of her legal difficulties without feeling a violent revulsion of sympathy, without having his teeth set on edge.

Poor little thing, she had been dragged through such gutters by that dog of a Scott, he reflected, that she used terms and expressed ideas quite foreign to her own nature. Probably, in the beginning, the fact of her husband's infidelity had been as shocking and as repulsive to her as it would be to any other fine woman. But she had had years in which to become accustomed to the idea, and in which to become familiar with all its repellent terminology.

"Don't dwell upon it, pussy, don't let's talk about it," Link would say, laughing uncomfortably, trying to win her back to the coquettish, mischievous moods he loved. But Marianne insisted upon constant allusions to her wretched first marriage; she wanted to convince Link, as she was entirely convinced herself, that the trouble between herself and Royal Scott had been in no way her fault. Her silver, her wedding presents, were still in Royal's possession, and she was anxious about them, and fretted because there were delays about regaining them. There was even a question of the cellar.

"My father sent me six cases of wine; they no more belong to Royal Scott than they do to you!" she said to Link, more than once.

Withal, she was irresistible, groomed and frocked and hatted to perfection, always the most conspicuous girl at any dance or gathering, always the woman men instantly noticed and flocked to meet. And even in the critical, impatient moods Link came somewhat to dread, and always minimized as much as he could with good-natured soothing and chaffing, she maintained her imperious and yet babyish charm.

"I'm bad," she would confess, her scarlet underlip thrust forward, her black eyes winking, her whole babyish, flat little body curled up in a big chair, the shining little slippers showing under the crooked knees. "I'm the wickedest person alive! But come over here and love me."

Link couldn't help going over there, and couldn't help loving her. She was made for loving, small and cuddly and boneless and fragrant; she could make him forget, in an instant, the pricking trifles in her manner and attitude that sometimes made him uneasy, the hints of coldness or coarseness or selfishness that flickered sometimes upon the surface of what was so pretty and so captivating.

When Marianne told him how she managed to make both her father and her husband pay for her fur coat, somehow it sounded funny, sounded like the impish maneuvers of a mischievous child. When she told Link that everybody had always been nasty to her, and she couldn't help being just a little nasty in return, but that when he and she were married, and her big man was buying her pretty things, and spoiling her, and making everything nice for her, she was going to be the goodest, wisest, craziest-about-her-husband little wife in the whole big world, he believed her.

"Of course, supposing that you still like me when I'm really and finally divorced, Link," she would add conscientiously. For Link would never assume, even when they were alone, that they could consider themselves justified in any planning before that time.

"Being unhappy is awfully bad for me," she told him seriously. And Link answered her with a great shout of laughter that made her demure little face break into laughter, too.

After the day down on the ranch, with Barbara and Barry, she was specially affectionate and gentle for a time.

"You like Barbara, don't you, Link?" she asked.

"Oh, sure. She's a great girl. She and I have the same birthday, you know. We've always made a sort of joke of it."

"She's twenty-seven?"

"Oh, no, I'm four years the older."

An incredulous look from Marianne.

"Link! She's more than twenty-three!"

"Nope. I've known her since she was a baby—knew her grandmother, old Mrs Bush. She's only twenty-three, but she's one of those queenly girls."

Marianne was dissatisfied with this.

"If you think she's so queenly," she commented, annoyed, "I wonder why you didn't fall in love with *her?*"

"Because I fell in love with you, pussy."

"I was only twenty-three when I married Royal!" Marianne stated irrelevantly. "I had beaus when I was sixteen."

She had a sudden and somewhat disconcerting way of referring almost any subject of conversation to herself, when it became a mere question of personalities. Dresses that she had worn, fashions of wearing her hair, effects of jeweled headbands or lace hose, were all treasured in Marianne's memory, and she loved to talk about them. Already she was planning, as Mrs Link Mackenzie, to "run on" to New York every spring for her new frocks and hats.

Meanwhile, the present was satisfactory neither to her nor to Link. Marianne chafed at the legal delays regarding her divorce, because the relationship between herself and Link was a constant anxiety and burden to her. They were not engaged, they were not free; to hold him at a steady level of devotion, through weeks and weeks of inaction, was beyond her power.

If she had been free, they would have been married in September, they would now have been man and wife for six months. But now it was April—May—and Marianne began to fear that only a sudden favorable turn in the tide would complete and secure her plans. If any break came between them now, it would be fatal, for Link naturally could not feel himself bound to a woman who was legally another man's wife, and indeed took great pains to impress her with the fact that, until she was actually unmarried from her first husband, he would in no way think of himself as her second.

Link's father had taken his position definitely. He disapproved of the marriage, he disliked the young lady, and he did not want her mentioned in his presence. If Link persevered in his plan to marry Mrs Scott, his father would make ample provision for him and his wife, but there would be no further talk of a partnership for Link, and his father's fortune would be divided between the two daughters of the house.

All Marianne's resolute, charming battery failed on the older man. Her subtle flatteries, her attentions, her thousand little daughterly graces had left him cold and unresponsive, even from the moment of meeting the

Wilsons' captivating young relative and guest, and when Link's feeling for her became evident, his father's distrust and dislike for Marianne deepened into a quite positive antagonism.

Marianne bore this airily and hardily, assuring Link he would change when once they were married. But the old man grew grayer, strangely gentler and sadder, as the summer wore away, and Link never knew a moment of real peace of heart or happiness, any more. He loved his father, he loved his sisters, and he loved, too, the old white-painted brick mansion under the big trees that had been his home for all the days of his life. But he knew now that he could not have these and Marianne, too. He must find a new home and a new business. And probably both would be away from Cottonwood. It would not do to have Link Mackenzie his own father's rival in the hardware or real estate field.

It was all the more distressing to him because, as was inevitable, he had had time now to see, in Marianne, some hints of the qualities that he knew his father and sisters had already discerned in her. She *was* cold and superficial and selfish, in some ways, poor little girl. But then she had had such an unhappy life! Perhaps happiness and peace of mind would soften her. Anyway, he loved her all the more for being imperfect. Everyone was imperfect! And even with the faults that he could not but see, Link was broad enough to deal patiently, in the humble conviction that he had plenty of faults of his own.

Marianne would get her divorce on a certain Monday, September fourth. And she planned to be married on the following day.

"I don't think it's nice to be married on the very same day!" she decided. "Do you, Link?"

"I hate all that part of it, dear. Let's not connect the two things at all, if we can help it!"

Her quick, resentful flush, as at a reproach.

"You've been talking to Lucy, I suppose?"

"Pussy, how sensitive you are!"

"I'm not sensitive at all. I *wish* you wouldn't always try to put me in the wrong, Link."

Sometimes, after a long, exhausting scene, he found himself wondering how one dealt with such episodes after marriage. Oh, well, when he and Marianne were once safely married, she would have less to be anxious and nervous about, she would be quite different.

He said to himself that it was a "funny" summer. His father was quiet and depressed. Margaret did not come home, but stayed in the East visiting school friends, and the elder Mackenzie went East himself for a few weeks, partly on business, partly to see his daughter.

Margaret was gone, Lucy was absorbed in husband and baby, Joe Dodge was married to a rich widow and living in San Francisco; Inez Wilson was ill, Barbara and Amy Atherton married and gone away, everything seemed changed, older and soberer. If there was a crowd now at Bartell's, having sodas, on week-day afternoons, or if there were

swimming parties on the Casino beach on Sundays, it was among the younger set, the girls and boys who had been in high school when Link's group was enjoying these things.

There was no croquet. Usually on Saturdays and Sundays Link drove Marianne to the country club, ten miles away, and while he played golf with older men, she sat on the porch, beautiful and saucy and exquisitely gowned, and fought over bridge points with older women.

And so July and August came and went. Next month!

Marianne would be his wife next month. Well, it would be a relief to have it all over, to have the die cast. But already Link was looking back at his first feelings toward Marianne, at the days when he had trembled at her slightest glance or word and had been afraid—tremblingly, sickeningly afraid—that he would never win her, as a man might look back at the delirium of a fever.

The hot season passed, and the little cottages of the summer visitors were shuttered and closed until another long vacation, and the fruit trees and the big maples were bared. Yellow leaves drifted down over the Wilson house and the Mackenzie house, and the leaf fires were lighted again. And it was September; it was October.

But Marianne did not get her decree. She explained to Link that the "horrid old judge" had made difficulties, and Link, secretly relieved at the respite, asked no questions. Marianne had established a California residence and had made her complaint on the grounds of desertion, presenting her suit through a San Francisco court. Link only knew that she had gone to San Francisco, a few days before she expected to secure her absolute decree, buoyantly telling him that she would buy a few pretties, too, while she was there, "because twenty-four hours after my widowhood I shall be a bride, Link!" and that she had come back angry and disappointed, because unforeseen complications had delayed the granting of the decree until January at the earliest.

His sister had gone back to school. Inez continued to enjoy an invalided state. She had had three minor operations in one year and had at last found a filling and absorbing life work. She talked only of anesthetics, surgery, sutures, and trained nurses. And Link went over to the Wilsons' every night and murmured with Marianne in the old-fashioned sitting room.

CHAPTER XIV

One day, a cloudy Christmas Eve, Link turned his horse's nose in at the collapsed old gate of the Du Spain ranch and stopped outside of the patio wall, with a call for Barbara.

There was no answer; there was no stir of life on the place, except that a few fowls, pecking disconsolately about the farmyard, avoided his horse's hoofs with loud squawks and plunges of fright.

A soft, mild winter afternoon, with a cool wind moving about like a moving wall, and clouds packing themselves grayly in a gray sky, above a pale gray, quiet sea.

The bare orchards were carpeted with yellow fallen leaves; there was shaggy yarrow standing brown and tall under the apple trees. The barns looked shrunken and dilapidated, a huddle of roofs and whitewashed weather-beaten walls and fences and sheds, with a low row of dead sunflowers bowing ceremoniously at each other, against one side of the long, low, shabby hacienda.

There had been unusually heavy rains, and the horse's feet picked up heavy clods and withdrew themselves from the mud with loud sucking and smacking noises. Link jumped down, and with the bridle over his arm and the old buckskin's face looking anxiously over his shoulder, he pushed open the patio door.

A slender woman, inside the court, was pinning baby linen to an improvised clothesline that crossed a corner at a slant. A tall woman, with her copper head bare and her cotton dress spattered and spotted with water. Barbara.

She looked a little pale; her hair was brushed carelessly off her forehead, and her hands were wet from washing. And for a few seconds she seemed bewildered.

Then pleasure lighted her tired face, and her color came back. She caught at Link's hands eagerly and clung to them.

"Well, Link Mackenzie!" said her pleasant rich voice welcomingly, "what a wonderful thing for you to do. Are you alone? Here, Goldie," she added, to the horse, "I'll put you in the corral."

"Happy birthday, Barbara!" the man said, grinning.

"Happy——?" She had obviously forgotten it. Then her face lighted. "Link—you're wonderful! You never forget it!" she said. "Happy birthday to you, too! I'm so sorry Barry's not here. I expected him home today," Barbara, handling the horse and removing his bridle with the expert ease of the farmer's wife, went on. "He went up to San Francisco, and he intended to get back today. But he won't be here until tomorrow now—he would have come out with Tomas at noon, if he'd been coming. Well, Link! How *good* it is to see you. But you look tired—you look thin," Barbara interrupted herself in quick concern. "You've been working too hard?"

"Perhaps," he conceded, as they walked back from the paddock where his horse had been loosed. "Oh, finish them—finish them!" he added, with a nod toward the dishpan on the ground, still filled with the wet, wrung baby clothes.

"Well, I will—it won't take me a moment." She was instantly and expertly busy with them again, snapping them smartly to free them from dampness and wrinkles, holding the clothespins in her mouth. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon, but the silent, sunless day seemed to have no time element; somber clouds moved overhead, and the wind-

mill creaked intermittently. A cat, arching itself about Barbara's legs, uttered dismal croaking.

"No, you can't come in, Mitsy," Barbara told the cat kindly. "She has kittens in the barn, and she is always wanting to bring them into the kitchen—and I can't blame her!" Barbara explained to Link, as she briskly snapped and pinned. "Somewhere, in some story I once read—and I think it was Dickens, I think it was those adorable Kenwigs," said Barbara, "there was a mother who was afraid a cat would suck her baby's breath. Doesn't it sound like Dickens! And I never have dared let Mitsy into the kitchen with Kate."

"With whom?" Link demanded, enjoying her.

"With my darter, Kate. That's her name."

"It sounds so grown-up somehow—Kate."

"Well, she'll be grown up some day, and I don't want her to be blighted with Totty or Pussy or Bootsy, or any of those baby names. But come in," Barbara invited him, picking up the empty dishpan, "and see her. She's grand."

Link, bending his head a little at the low lintel, followed her into the warm kitchen, where a fire was crackling hospitably, and where, in a washing basket set on the floor, not far away from it, a tiny baby lay sound asleep in a nest of white blankets and snowy pillow.

The rest of the room he knew; the reading table and couch, the sink and stove, the small-paned little windows like portholes with their sills of wide cement, the soft old tiles set irregularly underfoot. The room was dimly lighted, for the larger windows had no panes, were simple open oblongs in the walls and were now shuttered fast against the cold.

Link noticed nothing; he had eyes only for Barbara, as, shabby and slender and exquisite in her young motherhood, she went on her knees beside the basket and turned her radiant smile from his face to the tiny face on the pillow. There was something in her aspect then almost too sweet to be borne by the man, who felt himself rough, crude, and ignorant beside her chiseled fineness and sensitiveness.

"Barbara, eyelashes!"

"Imagine your noticing them! But, look!" She put the transparent scarlet tip of a finger ball beneath them, against the infinitely soft little pulpy cheek, and glanced up again proudly. "Her eyes are black as *night,*" added Barbara, in a tone with something of night's own mysterious darkness in it.

"And how old is she now?"

"Kate—was five weeks old yesterday," the mother said, computing.

"And you—ought you be——?" He hesitated, afraid of hurting her. But his little shrug indicated the patio, with its clothesline.

"Oh, but I'm gloriously well!" Barbara protested. And she laughed. "With Barry away, I have nothing to do!" she said.

"Is he wild about her?" Link was still watching the baby.

"We're both half-witted about her," Barbara answered proudly.

"And was she born here?"

"Right here in this room." Suddenly she paled again, and a dark shadow swept her beautiful eyes, like the shadow of a bird flying over still pools. Only an instant, and it was gone again, and she was smiling. But he had seen it.

"This woman Kate here," said Barbara, pursuing the subject serenely, "arrived a week before the date previous marconigrams had indicated. Consequently, her mother had only time to summon Maria Bettancourt from the next ranch here. Luckily, Maria was at home, and also her mother, Engracia Rivas. Old Mrs Rivas came waddling over here instantly and enjoyed the whole affair enormously."

The baby wakened suddenly and emitted a tiny acid cry. And Barbara stooped and gathered her to her breast, and sat down in a rocker opposite Link, beside the fire. The man, watching her intently, felt that something in the picture of this woman and her child, beside this lonely ranch-house hearth, was quite unbearable. The curves of her body, the tiny, downy circle of the unconscious baby head on her slender arm, the homely setting of the old kitchen all about her, and the firelight, painting her beautiful young cheeks red, and glinting on her copper hair, and striking a strange shining in her eyes, was poignantly lovely—possessed, indeed, that frightening loveliness upon which men dare not look too long.

"Barbara, what luck! Suppose you had been quite alone! Where was Barry?"

"Barry had gone off to Milo on an errand. When he returned and found the Bettancourts in possession, he promptly went off again."

She had begun the recital whimsically, amusedly. But her voice thickened treacherously on the last word, and her bright head drooped a little, over the gold fuzz of the baby's head.

He hadn't left her here in the ranch house to have her first baby with only two ignorant Portuguese women in charge? Link asked himself in horror. She might have died, as thousands of women, in safer surroundings, had died at this time.

"Barry hates suffering and he hates fuss," Barbara recommenced composedly, after a moment. "Everything went beautifully, and Dr Bonner, who arrived here at about six o'clock, found Kate in the best of health and spirits, about an hour old."

She would not let her thoughts stop here, she would not let herself remember the kitchen, painted with blood from a November sunset, angled and stabbed and rocking with agonies for some woman—not Barbara Atherton, but somebody else—a screaming, writhing girl on the couch there, with a frightened old Latin woman trying to hold her down.

Walls, floors, stove, windows, Maria's face, all familiar, yet all metamorphosed into monstrousness and hideousness. Red sunset streamers merciless and sickening, creeping down from the clock to the window, stove-lids, glinting on the faucets. Red—was that sunset, too?—on Maria's hands.

And then twilight and firelight and exhausted peace. No voice—it had been screamed away—no strength even to move languid eyes to the faces that bent over her. But peace. Her wet hair sticking to her forehead, and her head aching. But no more pain.

"Hello, baby. Hello. Kate. Stop that yelling, you've made enough fuss. Go to sleep, Kate." This in a whisper. That purple little pugilist was the baby.

Dusk, painted by red and black shadows under the kitchen's old adobe ceiling. Fire crackling, and Tomas whispering. And then professional skillful fingers at one's wrist.

"Dr Bonner"—one could still smile—"is she? Is she really a beauty? *I* thought she was."

Hot tea. Delicious, heartening. And then Barry's whisper at the patio door. Poor Barry, he had been crying. He came creeping, like a dog, to the side of the couch, he kissed the languid hand that hung there and broke into sobbing.

Five weeks ago yesterday. But Barbara could not quite happily remember it yet. It was shut in that new mysterious light in her eyes, it was a part of her now, with school days and measles, and her first sweethearts. Link saw what it had given her, the steady sweet flaming shine of it in voice and eyes and manner; he told himself that this was the young motherhood of the painters and the poets, the great miracle in a gray, tired world.

"And what took Barry to San Francisco?" he asked.

"Well—she's off again," Barbara murmured of the baby, but she did not put her down. "Well, it seems there is some queer old rich woman in San Francisco," she explained, "who sometimes sends struggling geniuses to Paris or New York to study art or literature. And a man Barry knows up there has been talking about Barry to her, and she wanted to see him. So he went up on—let's see, this is Thursday—he went up on Monday, and I expected him back today."

"And you've been here all alone since Monday?"

"With Kate, Mitsy, the Bettancourts right on the next ranch, and the chickens." Barbara would not play the martyr. "Now talk about yourself, Link," she said. "You don't know how lovely it is to see you. I went into town several weeks before the baby was born, to make arrangements at the hospital—this must have been in early October. And I've not been in since. Barry does all my marketing in Milo, and we are becoming absolute hayseeds. I had him telegraph the news to my father. Dad thinks that of course I was in Cottonwood when Kate came, and I'll let him think so until he comes up in the summer. But go ahead—what are your plans? Have you and Marianne set your date?"

"Not yet."

"And does your father feel any happier about it?"

Her face, lighted by the fire, was filled with sisterly anxiety and sweetness.

"No," he said briefly, seriously.

"Too bad!" She made no further comment, and for a few minutes they sat silent, looking at the fire.

"I know Marianne loves me," Link said presently, following his own obscure line of thought.

"People love differently," Barbara answered unexpectedly. He glanced at her suddenly, in surprise. It was true, of course, but he had never heard it put into a phrase before. It was clever of her to see it. "I suppose," she added, after a moment, "that, with your father, the stumbling block is the divorce?"

"The circumstances of it," Link answered. "He thinks Marianne is principally interested in marrying well," he went on a little awkwardly.

"You mean because of the money—you mean because you are rich?"

"*He* means that, anyway."

Barbara was silent, glancing down at the baby's head, looking into the fire. Suddenly she said unexpectedly:

"Link, money *is* important. I didn't think so before I was married. But I see it a little differently now."

"I don't see you marrying for it!" Link smiled.

"No," she agreed quickly, "I never could do that. And I don't believe Marianne would. But it is nice to feel that one's children will have a comfortable home—schooling—friends——"

Her voice stopped abruptly, and he saw the shine of quick tears on her lashes. She was biting her lip, swallowing hard, smiling, and it wrung Link's heart to see her put her thin hand tightly over her eyes, and drop her bronze head over the baby's head. For a long minute or two the tears had to have their way.

"The maddening part of a sharp sickness," she presently said with an apologetic laugh, in a voice that steadied on the words, "especially when it is one's first sickness, is that it makes one such a cry-baby. Nerves, perhaps. Anyway, don't worry about it, for I cry at everything, these days. I'm taking a tonic that looks as if it would put an elephant on its feet, so I'll soon be all right.

"These creatures," she added, drawing a long restorative breath and smiling down at the baby, "these creatures are great responsibilities. I would not be ambitious in my wish to wish myself much better but for Kate!" she said, with a significant smile for Link.

"Portia, eh?" the man said, grinning. "You were a great Portia."

"Funny to look back at it—it was eight years ago, I was only sixteen," Barbara said. "Harry Poett was Shylock—were you in that, Link? Yes, of course you were! You were the judge. Fun, fun, fun—school days," she added dreamily, as if half to herself.

"How different everything looked then," Link said somewhat obscurely.

"Well, didn't it? I have time to think it all over now," Barbara said, with a little laugh that indicated her surroundings, "and I often wonder

what we'd think if we could look back at those school kids again, hear ourselves talking, ten years ago. In the first place," she went on thoughtfully, "I think we were all rather undeveloped—in Cottonwood, don't you? I never thought of marrying, or things of that sort, when I was eighteen and nineteen."

"Well, neither did I!"Link agreed eagerly, sympathetically.

"But I think the girls and boys nowadays do," Barbara submitted with a dubious glance.

"Oh, I *know* they do!"

"We must have been dumb," Link suggested, after a pause.

"I don't know. But, anyway," Barbara said, "we were all for picnics, walks, movies, and sodas at Bartell's, and 'intellectual games'—will you ever forget the 'intellectual games'! Speaking for myself," she went on innocently, "this much-discussed modern element of passion and—well, and sex, and all that, simply didn't enter my calculations at all!"

"Nor mine!" Link assented quickly.

"As a matter of fact," Barbara continued, with a faint accent on the last word, "Marianne seemed to be the one to stir us all up. Suddenly we were all excited because you were the best matrimonial prospect in town, and Fox didn't have enough to marry on, and Barry du Spain was the handsomest boy in town but didn't have a cent, and a lot of things we'd never thought of before!"

She put the baby carefully back into the basket and moved about the kitchen with the easiness of long familiarity. Quite simply and deftly she lighted two candles on the mantel, and smiled at Link over the big spoon from which she took her tonic.

"Glass of milk, Link?"

"I'd love it!"

The open pantry door emitted, upon a cold draught of air, the smell of stored apples and rotting wet wood, cheese and clean milk tins; Barbara brought the rich milk, topped with clots of cream, in two mismated glasses, and closed the door again. The fire, roused by the current of air, sent the strong odor of wood smoke through the room.

"And would you have a piece of bread and butter?" Barbara asked her guest simply. "We have sweet butter today. No," she answered his quick glance with a laugh. "I didn't churn it! Maria did; she comes over to do heavy work twice a week."

Link thought of the girls in Cottonwood, of Inez's teatable, all silver and glitter, all damp little oozing sandwiches, ranged pastel-colored peppermint tablets, and rich walnut cookies; of Inez lounging in lace and ribbons, and Marianne smoking cigarette after cigarette, and reddening her lips after every sip of tea. This was very different hospitality; he was hungry after his ride, and he felt its charm poignantly and surprisingly.

Barbara cut home-made whole-wheat bread; the big loaf was clumsy and amateurish in shape, but the crusty slice was delicious, and the feast

had all the elements of perfection: good company, firelight, and appetite.

"How long were you and Barry engaged, Barbara?"

She smiled, glanced at him wide-eyed.

"Why, but we weren't engaged at all, of course! That is, except from eleven o'clock on a Saturday morning until exactly noon, when we were married."

"But you had had an understanding?"

"No. Barry and I fell in love with each other *after* we were married—we've often talked of it," Barbara said. "Suddenly, that morning, there didn't seem to be any reason why we *shouldn't* be married—it was rather like the line of least resistance!" she confessed cheerfully. "Of course," Barbara went on, laughing, "there was every reason in the world against it, but we didn't know that then!"

"How do you mean every reason in the world?" Link asked, with his puzzled, honest frown.

"Why, financial reasons first, foremost, and always," Barbara answered. "And then professionally, too. Barry shouldn't ever had been burdened with a wife and child! And temperamentally, he is the sort of man who worries frightfully when the woman he loves needs anything, and yet who is too much of a little boy to go out and battle for her! But, however," she finished sensibly and contentedly, "married he is, and likely to remain so, and there you are! I don't think most persons think much about marriage before they're in it," Barbara added conversationally, finishing her milk with great satisfaction. "I don't think they *can*. Things are bound to turn out entirely different from what one expects, and the main thing is—the main thing is," she finished philosophically and in a whimsical light tone that did not entirely deceive him, "that there's nothing so happy in the world as marriage, and nothing at all like having a bold girl, like Kate here, on the premises!"

"Suppose anyone, you and Barry, for instance, had been engaged a long time," Link began, with a quite transparent attempt at generalities, "and suppose you felt that you would rather pull out of it. Would that be—would that be—a decent thing to do?"

"It would be a decent thing to do—it would be *the* decent thing to do," Barbara answered promptly. "But if you're asking *me*," she added, "I would never have had the courage for it. I hate to face issues and take stands. And I should imagine that a lot of other persons—you, for instance, Link," she added, smiling, "would be worse than I am about it! It takes character to manage, not only your own will—but your own vacillations!" she finished.

"Barbara," Link said suddenly out of a silence, during which each had been staring thoughtfully into the fire, lost in the train of his own thoughts, "I'll tell you. I don't think Marianne and I care for each other—as we did—as we ought to. It seems to me that it would have been a terrible mistake to marry a year ago, when we first talked about it, before I knew about her first marriage."

"Well, if you had married then," Barbara suggested thoughtfully, and a little hesitatingly, "so many other emotions and experiences would have taken the places of all the—the love-making and engagement feelings, that you would be—" she groped for words—"that you can't say you wouldn't have been happy," she said. "But long engagements are terrible. That first—that first wild excitement of discovery isn't intended to last indefinitely," she submitted.

"We quarrel," Link confessed miserably. "And then, the minute we've parted, she writes me these frantic notes, begging me to forgive her." He paused. "My sister Margaret and my father—as I was telling you—think," he added frowningly, and a little ashamedly, "that it's partly because Marianne cares about money—is glad to be marrying where there is plenty of it——"

"And don't you think there may be some truth in that, Link?" Barbara asked, studying his face thoughtfully, as he stopped short.

"Well, if there is?" he asked, almost a little defiantly. "I don't blame her. I'm not so stuck on myself that I expect a girl to go crazy over the idea of cooking and washing for me for the next forty years! And that makes it all the harder to break it off," he ended, scowling.

"You mean you really would like to break it off, Link?" Barbara asked straightforwardly.

"I think so, now—for awhile. Even if after awhile it all began again," he admitted, distressed. "A man sounds like an awful cad, talking like this. But she sprang the news of her first marriage on me only after we were actually talking of being married immediately," he went on. "I don't blame her—she's a nervous little thing, and she was all worked up and distressed and worried, she didn't know what to do. But from then on—I've felt I was an awful rotter, engaged to a woman who really was tied to another man.

"That's part of the trouble," added Link, as Barbara, studying his face intently, was silent. "She loathes this bounder of a Scott so, she's detested the thought of him for so long, that actually she feels free. *I* don't feel she's free. I can't. And—Marianne's different from other women," he argued, interrupting one troubled line of thought to follow another; "she has no mother, her father is married to a woman she hates. She's affectionate. And for a whole year now," Link finished, with an apologetic grin for his hearer, "I've felt that I was getting in wrong—more and more wrong—and yet I'm not the one to make the break."

Barbara was silent for a long while, and Link mended the fire, whose crackling flames lighted the big room far more than the feeble candlelight could.

"Want the lamp, Barbara?"

"It's not filled."

"Well, let me fill it, then. Where's the oil?"

She glanced toward the pantry, frowned faintly, and got up to put a candle in a more advantageous position.

"I don't know that there is any!" she announced freshly and cheerfully, as if just making the discovery. "I don't order it unless I have a really big order for the man at Milo, because he has to do all his delivering himself after hours."

Link's acceptance of the situation with a matter-of-fact smile did not betray him, but he felt something stir deep within him, as if his soul winced.

"Link," Barbara said suddenly, back in her seat beside the fire.

"Barbara?"

"If—under the circumstances, you could steel yourself to take Marianne quite simply at her word, the next time you quarrel——"

She paused, thinking it out.

"Impossible," he said. "The next morning; or the same afternoon, there is always a note. Once she came to the office."

"You could go away for several months," Barbara suggested, after thought. "Your father would certainly make it easy for you. Ben Judson, from your office, is always going to Kansas City or Los Angeles or somewhere. But the point is," the girl added, smiling and shaking her head, "have you character enough, before you go, to tell her, and Inez and your father and Lucy, and so on, that it's *over*—definitely done with. I shouldn't have! I'd sneak away, leaving everything half settled," Barbara confessed laughing. "And then it'd be all to do when you came back. And by that time she might have the date set, and the trousseau all ready!"

"I know," Link agreed, with a heavy sigh. "It isn't that I'm not fond of her," he went on suddenly, "I'm awfully sorry for her, I think she's had a rotten deal. She's affectionate—or at least she loves affection——"

"And beautiful," Barbara prompted.

"And beautiful. But—but this whole darned mess makes me feel so confused, as if I was acting in the dark, and being fooled like a kid," Link confessed boyishly. "I don't know why the Judge refused her her decree in September, I know I followed her up to town once, in August, I think this was, and found her having tea with Fox Madison at the Palace."

"Well, no harm in that!" Barbara laughed.

"No. I suppose not," he said discontentedly. "They said they'd met by accident, but afterward something she let slip showed that they'd gone in together on the train. I wish to God she wasn't always scheming and framing up perfectly simple things that don't matter a rap, anyway!"

"Why don't you see her tonight?——"

"She's in town. She went in yesterday," Link interrupted.

"Perhaps she and Barry are having tea together today," Barbara suggested, and laughed wholesomely.

The man looked at her quickly.

"Wouldn't you mind?"

"Mind their having tea? Heavens!" Barbara said, and laughed again.

"You aren't jealous, Barbara?"

"No. I trust people. But, perhaps," Barbara conceded, "if I loved someone who was always deceiving me, and teasing me, and humiliating me before other persons——I don't mean Marianne, of course!" she broke off, in quick apology.

"But Marianne *is* something like that," Link admitted gloomily.

"Well, girls of that type think that that shows their power over men," Barbara explained quite simply. "They consider it a proof of being charming, I think. It always seemed to me silly," she added. "I would just as soon annoy my father or mother, or Amy, as tease Barry that way. Listen!" she broke off suddenly, with a brightening face. "Here's Barry now!"

The door opened, upon a draught of cold air, and muffled and coated, carrying a milk pail, Barry came in. Link saw her kiss him, her slender arms tight about his bulky wrappings, and caught Barry's suspicious, hostile glance as Barbara took the pail into her own hands.

"Barry—what fun! You came down on the afternoon train! Here's Link, in the gloom. We've been jabbering like parrots for an hour. You're frozen, poor darling—wait a minute, I'll make you a cup of cocoa or something."

"I didn't know you had asked Link down," Barry said stiffly and displeasedly, his teeth chattering as he cast off his outer garments and sat lamely down by the fire.

"You sound as if you had a cold, dear!"

"Oh," he spoke patiently, long-sufferingly. "I'm extremely *ill.*"

"Barry! Then you ought to be in bed."

Barry looked with elaborate significance at Link. And Link immediately arose to go.

"Bad weather for colds, and it's a rotten day, too," Link said cheerfully. "Take care of yourself, Barry. You wouldn't like me to ask Bonner to come down?"

"Please don't trouble yourself, I wouldn't drink cocoa in the state I'm now in if you paid me," Barry said in an undertone to Barbara, choosing to let it appear that he had not heard Link.

"Good-by, Kate—your Uncle Link thinks you're a great baby!" Link said to the cradle. "Good-by, Barbara. Love to Amy and your father when you write!"

"I will." She walked with him to the door, composedly enough, but he saw that she was nervous.

"Doctor?" he asked, raising his eyebrow, just at parting.

She compressed her lips, raised her eyebrows, and faintly shook her head. There was even a cryptic smile behind her eyes.

"Shut it!" Barry shouted. And with something between a desperate laugh and a shocked and apologetic exclamation Barbara slammed the heavy door upon the patio. Link was mildly surprised to find cool winter daylight lingering among the shabby old whitewashed farm buildings and

bare fruit trees; in Barbara's kitchen there had been the darkness of early evening. A storm was gathering in rifts and curls of dark cloud across the southern sky; the sea was heaving like something that simmered rather than moved shoreward, little waves rocked in irresolutely, rocked out again.

The buckskin had come to the paddock bars and whinnied homesickly to his master. Link caught the bridle from the post where Barbara had hung it, and had it buckled in a matter of seconds. Mounting, he looked uncertainly toward the patio door; might she come out to the line of baby garments that were writhing and bellying like little ghosts in the cool, windy twilight, and say good-by to him again? What was going on there, in the dark, low-browed old kitchen, with the sick, surly man beside the fire, and the tiny baby slumbering, and the girl who had been Barbara Atherton moving between sink and stove?

He lingered, watching. But the moments passed, and the windmill creaked, and restless gulls were blown, peeping, over the hacienda. She did not come to the kitchen door. Darkness and storm gathered, deepened, the winter night strode toward him like some fabled monster out of the cold north.

Link gave the horse his head, bent his own head to the wind, and rode slowly away into the dusk.

Left alone with Barry and the baby, Barbara was far too wise to precipitate a disagreeable conversation. She brewed tea, and buttered Barry's favorite trimmed slices of bread, and placed a filled plate and a brimming, smoking cup close at his elbow. She washed two large potatoes at the sink and put them in the oven; it was not yet five o'clock, but there was no depending upon the stove in this weather.

It had been delicious to see Link, to hear all the town gossip, to feel one's self shaken up and interested and a part of the world again. Barbara felt the happiness, the lightness of her changed mood in everything she did, in every step she took, felt it, indeed, written upon her face. But Barry was the immediate duty, and she took care that he should have no cause to suspect that she was thinking of anything else.

"God, I've had a frightful day!" Barry presently burst out aggrievedly.

"You missed your train?" Barbara was merely assisting the conversation, but Barry stopped drinking his tea, and looked over his cup with a sort of patient sneer.

"Oh, no, I got it of course!" he said.

Barbara said nothing to this, being not so much angry as bored by his rudeness, and not surprised at all.

"I missed it by one minute, the street car got into a block," he resumed presently, drinking and shivering elaborately, and interrupting himself now and then to permit his teeth to rattle. "Now what's the matter?" he broke off, in exasperation. "What have I said?"

"I don't think you're very polite," Barbara said, hurt, sitting down

and taking the wide-awake baby into her arms. "She's going to have the blackest eyes in the world, she'll be a terror!" Barbara thought, with satisfaction.

"Polite? Because I said I'd caught the train? Oh, for the Lord's *sake!*" Barry raged. "I come home—just to be with you, I miss my train, just because I can't afford to take a taxi, I get a lift on the Milo school bus and ride down with a pack of dam' kids, instead of taking a taxi from Cottonwood, I walk through Tomas's place and get your milk for you, when I'm as sick as a dog . . ."

It went on and on, up and down. Barbara nursed the baby, a scarf drawn over the full, blue-veined white breast, and the soft little head. Her eyes went dreamily from Kate's furiously working mouth to the fire.

Presently Barry was still, except for the sound of angrily swallowed tea. The smoldering, sulphurous silence that repression and anger create began to widen between husband and wife. Barbara was wearied unto death of that silence.

"Come on, now, Barry, be sweet and talk to me. I'm dying to hear all the things that have happened to you!"

Silence. Barry went to the stove and poured himself another cup of tea.

"Now you know," Barbara began persuasively, "you know we'll be friends again in a few minutes, and that this is just a waste of time!—Pour half that out, and fill your cup up from the kettle," she interrupted herself to direct him. "You can't drink it strong like that!"

"*I* haven't been fighting," Barry said sulkily, obeying her instructions carefully.—"How much sugar do I take?—I came home dying to see you, it seems to me that *that's* perfectly evident from the fact that I came! Never in my life—except that I feel ill—have I been any gladder to get home than I was tonight. And then to find you had company here, you and Link Mackenzie having a grand time, and his dam' 'Uncle Link' to the baby—I loathe that trick of kids calling the doctor and the ashman and the minister 'Uncle' this and that."

"Well, now, darling, it's all over, and there's nothing to quarrel about—except that you were terribly rude to poor Link."

"How do you mean rude? I was sick and exhausted—I couldn't be expected to dance and sing for him, could I? He with his horse and his airs, and I carrying in the milk pail."

"But, never mind, you're better, and he's gone, and I'm dying to hear about your trip," Barbara persisted resolutely, touched by the thought of the romantic Barry seen to such disadvantage.

"Well, then, kiss me, and don't be a devil to me on Christmas Eve!" Barry pleaded, in a meek little penitent voice. And he put down his cup, and came across the kitchen, and knelt down beside Barbara, and encircled both her and the baby with his long arms. His tired pale face was beautiful with love and compunction; he dropped it against her own warm cheek, and shut his eyes. "My God, I love you!" he murmured wearily.

"Look at her, Barry, with her bad bold eyes open!" Barbara adjured him suddenly.

He roused from drowsiness, looked at the baby.

"She's a cute muggins!"

"Feel her little fingers grip, Barry. Give her your fingers."

"For the Lord's sake!" he whispered, struck, and with a boy's foolish, abashed grin.

"Here, you sit here; and hold her," Barbara directed him. He obeyed her contentedly, and she put the bundled baby into his arms. "Lean back—be comfortable," Barbara said. "There—now your Daddy's got you, precious. See that she doesn't kick her feet free—don't *do* that, Kate!" she scolded, as the baby indeed brought a pair of squirming bare little extremities into view. "You *must* see her get her bath tomorrow, her first Christmas!" Barbara told Barry radiantly. "She's getting too cute! I'm going to hang up her stocking with ours tonight!"

"Gosh, that hot tea went to the spot, Barberry. I was regularly sick when I came in!" Barry said gratefully. He rocked slowly, gently cradling the staring and wriggling baby in his arm. "Say, she's a regular pug—she seems twice as old as when I went away," he commented, amazed.

"Well, isn't she? She raised her little head up like a turtle today, when she heard my voice," Barbara stated proudly. She had been running a mental gauntlet between all possible and impossible puddings, in the last half-hour, but it would never do to let Barry suspect it. Men were useless when the planning of meals was in order; Barry would only say "not for me," no matter what suggestion she made, and no matter how disappointed he would be if there were no dessert. "If I had three figs, or four dates." Barbara's thoughts ran. "Baked potatoes, turnips, the abalone heated up—and what? Corn-meal pudding, bread pudding, rice—tapioca—cornstarch—we're out of cornstarch and vanilla, too—French toast, he's sick of it, baked apples he's sick of, squash pudding—squash pie, he adores squash pie. But it's too late to go out to that freezing barn and grope about and find that squash. I'll get it tomorrow.—Oh, *joy!*"

With the last mental ejaculation came a sudden access of energy. Four cheese balls with cream, four toasted soda crackers, and Link's delightful, novel, exciting box of taffies—forgotten until this instant. There was a dessert for a king.

She began dinner preparations happily. The kitchen was warm and comfortable, and the angelic baby lay wide awake, staring, or seeming to stare, with an eerie interest that captivated both parents, at the red and black shadows that lapsed and swelled in her little world.

"Tell me about your old lady, Barry. Did she burst into tears and say that you looked like the boy she lost in the Civil War?"

"She did not! She's an awful old pill," Barry answered frankly.

"Oh, and there's no New York in it for us?"

"*Us!* That's the trouble. She won't have anything to do with married

men. She says she never helps anything but young fellows with no families."

"Well, did you ever hear the like of that!" Barbara exclaimed, busy now belting, strapping, and pinning the baby, who lay on her back on the table, in complicated layers of blankets and garments. "We don't care, do we, Kate?" Barbara went on hardily. "We consider the source, and we give loud, rude laughs at ladies like that. Do you know I think she has an awful nerve to say that to you!" she added, straightening Kate's wrappings, and winding her little doublegown warmly about her feet. "Just put your hand out here and steady her, Barry, while I make up her bed."

She was on her knees, patting and shaking and tucking at the microscopic couch vigorously; presently she laid the baby, still staring, like a little sausage within it, and covered her, and grasping the handles of the basket, bore her away to the darkest corner of the room.

"Are you awfully disappointed, darling?" she asked.

"I am not," said Barry "I never had much faith in the old girl anyway, and if *Napoleon Third* is taken, we can thumb our noses at her! I don't see that twenty old fussy women could give me more than I've got at this moment."

"Plus a little kerosene oil," Barbara suggested, as he paused. "This dimness is terrible to me."

"I'll get some tomorrow. Have we any money?" Barry asked, with simplicity.

"We have four dollars Tomas paid me this afternoon for the calf. It's there in the box. And a week from tomorrow's New Year's, and he'll owe us fourteen for the cows."

"Then," Barry summarized it, "I'd say we are on Easy Street!"

"Well——" She gave a forlorn and yet joyful laugh.

"Was I a dirty dog to Link?" Barry presently said.

"You were."

"But I did you a poem this afternoon, Barberry, for a Christmas present. I did it coming down in the train. I got to thinking what a wonder you are, and how I love you, and—I've got it somewhere here."

She caught it eagerly, the face that Link had seen pale and tired that afternoon shining and rosy; she carried it to the candlelight.

"Barry!" she said thickly, adoringly, reproachfully, when she read it. And in her exquisite voice she began to read it again:

> *"'You gather all the things I love in one,*
> *I have no mirth but you are mistress of;*
> *The skies I love, and the warm stars I love,*
> *The sea, and the white beach it breaks upon*
> *Are mine because you give them . . .'*

Ah, Barry," Barbara cried, interrupting herself, and tucking the paper into her pocket, "you do love me?"

"Love you?" he echoed, shaken. And he stopped her in her busy way across the kitchen, and prisoned her shoulders in his big hands, and crushed his own mouth against her sweet, protestant lips. "Is that for dinner?" he asked appreciatively, eyeing the abalone.

"Yes—I had put it away out in the woodshed, to be sure to keep it for you tomorrow, but now that you're here we'll have it tonight. Tomas got it, yesterday, on Abalone Rock."

"Gosh, there is no place like home!" Barry muttered, sinking into his favorite chair. "I'll get you oil tomorrow, I promise it—even if I have to walk to Milo myself and bring it back."

"She's asleep. Is that a good baby or *isn't* it?" Barbara, after an expedition of inspection to the corner of the room, asked triumphantly.

"She's a wonder. This is a happy time, isn't it, Barberry?"

"This is lovely."

"This," said Barry, as he so often said, "is the Kingdom of Heaven!"

CHAPTER XV

THE CLOCK STRUCK NINE, struck ten. And still Link Mackenzie sat before the fire, in his dimly lighted bedroom, his jaws set, his half-lidded eyes fixed on the flames, his big fingers loosely linked, thinking.

The luxury, the beauty and order of his own home had struck him with a sharp sense of pain after his long ride back from the ranch. A man at the stable to greet him cheerfully when the buckskin trotted into the box stall; a smiling maid to open the side door to Mr Link. Fires everywhere, flowers everywhere. Massed button chrysanthemums in the halls, violets, big double white violets on jointed stems, standing on his desk; this last was Lucy's touch, she never let a day pass without some similar little evidence of affection for her big brother.

His own room seemed tonight a very palace of ease and beauty; there was a coal fire burning in the old-fashioned rodded fireplace, the window shades were drawn against the winter night, his books were waiting, his night light and his big white bed, his favorite leather chair and reading lamp, all in order. And in the bathroom lights were blazing white in the mirrors, and reflected in little pools in the enameled tub and washstand; his towels were fat and white, his soaps and powders delicately perfumed.

His father was dining at the Roaches', where he would play bridge afterward; Link had old Martin bring him up a tray with his dinner, and went over his mail, as he absentmindedly disposed of the meal Tilly had taken pains to make unusually inviting.

And all the time he thought of Barbara. Somehow her material disadvantages worried him bitterly tonight. Barry was an ass, of course, but she had married him, and she must love him—girls did love such men.

But the dark kitchen . . . The little baby whose crib was a big wash-

basket. The wet garments being pinned to a clothesline in the afternoon wind. The loneliness, the silence, the desolation of the old hacienda. No lights, no luxury, no bathroom and reading table for Barbara, no kindly efficient service and delicately cooked food. Link remembered the smell of mice, mould, cheese, and apples that had come out in that cold draught from the pantry; he remembered her plain kitchen dress, spattered with water.

"What hell she's been through!" he muttered, half aloud. "Married, and with a baby! Barbara—let's see—she isn't twenty-five yet. What'll become of her, I wonder? For she surely can't go on like that."

There was a fat letter from Marianne among his other letters; he kept it for the last. She always wrote him exhaustively when she was away; pages and pages of large sprawling handwriting, almost illegible, as was the fashion of her generation, arrived almost every day.

Link read this letter, sent away his tray, lowered the lights, and flung himself into his leather chair. And here he sat—while the clock hands moved from eight to nine, and nine to ten, thinking, thinking, thinking—thinking.

It was after eleven when he heard his father coming softly upstairs and, going to his own door, called to him.

"Dad, could you come in here a minute? I want to talk to you about something."

Major Tom, blowing and rosy from his recent encounter with the cold night air, was instantly concerned.

"Feel all right?" he asked anxiously, coming in. He put his overcoat, cap, and muffler on a chair, rubbed his cold hands together, and approached the fire with a long "ah-h-h!" of satisfaction. "Roach keeps his house like a vault!" he observed. And then, with a keen, dissatisfied look at his son, as he sank into the leather chair Link has just vacated, he asked again: "You're all right, aren't you?"

"I guess so," Link said boyishly, miserably. And he took the chair opposite his father, planted his elbows on his knees, and bowed himself far forward, his big hands rumpling his hair.

"Why, what is it?" the older man asked tenderly. And there was breaking, was expectation, as well as sympathy, in his tone.

"I don't know what to do!" Link confessed, throwing his head back and smiling unhappily at his father.

Tom Mackenzie took a large handkerchief from his pocket, blew his nose, put back the handkerchief and rubbed his hands. His heart shook with a fearful hope as keen as pain. He had prayed for this hour. But he gave no sign.

"What's matter, Link?" he asked briefly, in a businesslike tone.

Link was silent for a few minutes, first glancing quickly and appraisingly at his father's face, as if he meant to estimate the older man's mood, and then returning his gaze to the fire. Presently he drew and expelled a great breath.

"Well, I think I'm in wrong, and I want to get out!" he said simply.

His father felt his heart stop. But instantly he knew his rôle. He looked at Link, pursed his lips and elevated his eyebrows. There was a certain timidity in his aspect, a suggestion of a shrug moved his broad shoulders. He dared not speak. The wrong word now——!

"It's Marianne," Link said then. "I think—I *know* that I don't want to marry her."

His father eyed him seriously, patiently. His voice was mild. But his pulse hammered.

"Well, I'd be very glad if that was the case, Link."

"The trouble is," Link added impatiently, "that I don't think she—that is, I think she is kind of counting on it."

"Yes," said his father promptly, unemotionally. "I suppose she is." And again he fell silent.

The room was very quiet; only one lamp was lighted, but the shine of the fire found angles and bright lines everywhere, and the violets sent a heart-piercing sweetness through the soft, warm air. Link's mother, painted at eighteen, with roses in her bright hair, looked smilingly down at him, from the mantel. Above the thick little gold oval that framed her, two old swords were crossed, the one her father had carried at Manassas, the one Link's Mackenzie grandfather had worn at Gettysburg. And the epaulettes that had decorated the blue uniform and the gray with their heavy bullion fringe tarnished and their colors long forgotten, held the reconciled swords in place.

Warmth, quiet, peace, in here. But a nagging little wind was fingering at the windows, and Link suddenly thought of the hacienda, swept by the winter gales and the sea fogs, dim in candlelight, scented with mice, cheese, and rotting apples. He brought his thoughts back to Marianne.

"Dad," he said, after a long silence. "What can a man—a decent man, do?"

His father pursed his lips again, considering. But Tom Mackenzie was not really thinking of the immediate problem—it had been heavy on his spirit for a whole long year, it had worn his heart thin. The significance of tonight's attitude, on Link's part, was that at last there appeared to be a loophole—a chance, that he might really hear, really understand at last. And slight, and utterly unexpected as that opening was, it made his father tremble with hope and fearful joy, it made him afraid to speak, afraid to be silent, lest the precious opportunity be wasted or be spoiled by some impulsive word from himself.

"She's legally a married woman, ain't she, Link?" the older man, with that favorite grammatical lapse of the business man, asked presently.

"Yep," Link answered. "But not any more married this minute than she has been since I met her!" he admitted. "Or rather, since she told me she was," he amended after a pause.

His father looked at him, perplexed.

"How do you mean?" he asked simply.

"Well," Link began. And in his voice there sounded the deep relief of being able to discuss the matter, in anything like a sympathetic atmosphere, at last. "I fell in love with her before I knew she was married," he explained. "And then we—we were engaged."

"How could you be engaged? She knew she was married, if you didn't!" his father reasoned promptly.

"Yes, I know—but she was—sort of—carried off her feet," the boy elucidated, somewhat lamely. "She's a funny little thing, impulsive and unreasonable, and all that, and she knew then that she meant to divorce Royal Scott, and she just let things drift."

"H'm!" the old man muttered, pondering. "And then, when she told you that she wasn't free, there wasn't any talk of an 'engagement,' then, eh?"

"Oh, no, there couldn't be. She was horribly nervous for fear that her husband would find out she was in love with me," Link said. "She made a claim of desertion, you know, and all he had to do was to rejoin her, or try to rejoin her, at any time during the year to have the whole case thrown out! So she was pretty careful——" He paused. "But of course it was understood that we would be married when she was free," he added, his tone becoming troubled and doubtful again.

"You wrote her letters to that effect," the father asked unemotionally.

"Well, not after I knew she was married!"

"Didn't, eh?" There were relief and pride struggling under the voice the older man tried to make dispassionate and calm.

"No, sir."

"I'm glad of that," Major Tom observed mildly. And after a pause, during which Link scowled, and stared down at the rug, he added: "What makes you think you'd like to be quits?"

Link looked up, shook his head, and shrugged.

"Done, eh?" The elder Mackenzie could hardly believe his own words, wondered if this was only a dream wrought of his anxious thought.

"Yep," Link said again.

"Well, if your feeling toward her is changed, my boy, you certainly mustn't marry her," his father said gravely. "Women take these things very seriously—you can't deceive 'em. She'd know you didn't love her, no matter what you said."

"I'm not sure," Link began, squeezing his palms together, and fixing his distressed eyes upon his father, "I'm not sure it *would* make any difference with Marianne. She—it matters to her that I'm—that——"

"Rich." His father supplied the word quietly. "I see," he said. And for awhile father and son sat silent, thinking.

"You see," Link began presently, in a troubled voice, "we quarrel now terribly. She—she does a lot of things that make me feel mad," he confessed, with a shamefaced grin. "She flirts and hurts my feelings and all that—she thinks it's funny. But she always makes it up, and she always talks—she always *talks* about being rich, and building a big place here

some day. She said to me last week that she wanted me to give her a roadster for a wedding present, said she'd picked it out."

He laughed awkwardly, and his father smiled, too, and pursed his lips.

"I have this feeling," Link recommenced. "If I could make the break now, while she is still waiting for her decree, then I could get away with it, because she couldn't make any fuss about it. Even though," he added doubtfully, "I don't think she would ever have applied for her divorce if it hadn't been that she wanted to marry me."

"And when does she get this decree?" the other man asked.

"About the third of February."

"That's a little more than a month," Tom Mackenzie mused heavily.

"Exactly six weeks. But the provocation," Link said, touching the folded sheets of a bulky letter he took from his dressing-gown pocket, "the provocation could be this."

"Ah-h-h!" his father said, his eyes lighting. "What's all that?"

"This is a letter she wrote me from San Francisco yesterday," Link said, ruffling the pages. "She went up there day before yesterday, to see the Judge. And in this letter she explains why her decree was delayed last September. If it hadn't been," he added, "we would have been married three months ago, at least. But it seems there were circumstances of which I was entirely ignorant."

"More mystery!" the father commented.

"Yes, she—she loves mystery. She writes me here that after she filed her suit for divorce, and after she and I had had our understanding, her husband came to San Francisco and sent her a telegram, here to Cottonwood, that he wanted to see her. She went right up, in a horrible state of nervousness, of course."

"This was when?"

"This must have been late January, a year ago. She didn't say anything to anyone, but she went up to the hotel, and they dined together, and had a sort of reconciliation, I imagine. Anyway they registered as Mr and Mrs Royal Scott, at the hotel, and stayed there two nights."

"My God, what a woman!" Tom Mackenzie said, in disgust.

"Well, she's funny," Link had to admit. "But, anyway, on the second day she says they quarreled." He touched the letter. "I know, I know, it's awful," he agreed, in answer to his father's look. "But she's an undisciplined child. They quarreled, and Marianne, shaken by the excitement, the emotion, and the general wretchedness of the whole business, went back to her lawyer and told him to go on with the suit."

"What did you think of all this, Link? This doesn't sound to me like a very honorable way to settle things," the old man protested.

"I didn't know anything about it! I never even suspected it until tonight. She writes me about it in this letter. It seems that, when she went up to get her decree in September, there was some delay. Whether Scott had been to the court, or his attorney appeared for him and raised an objection—she doesn't make that very clear—but, anyway, the Judge

refused the decree, and she came back here heartbroken. We were to have been married the next day.

"But she never told me anything. She just said that there was a technical hitch, and that the divorce would go through a few months later. And I never asked her, God knows I hated the whole business!"

"Well, Link," his father said, when the bitter young voice had died into silence, "the point is whether you've got nerve enough to split, now, and character enough to stick to it when you do split. She's a mighty seductive woman to a young fellow like you."

Link heard Barbara's voice, on the same phrases. "It takes character," she had said, "to manage not only your own will but your own vacillations!"

"But it's what I've got to do," he said to his father soberly.

"You do feel it so, Son?" the other man returned, after a long, shrewd scrutiny.

"Yes, sir. It seems to me," Link smiled forlornly, "it's now or never," he said. "I've been an awful fool about it, but that doesn't mean that I want to go on being a fool."

"Well!" his father said, after another study of Link's agitated face. "Well! I admit that this takes a—considerable—load from off my heart. But she'll try to get around you," he added, suddenly anxious.

"I was wondering if I could go away. In Ben's place, say. His wife has got a young baby; he'd like to be let off the spring trip."

"Yes, but that's—but that's—well, I think we could find you something else than that!" his father said.

"No, but that's what I'd like—that's what I'd like!" the boy said eagerly. "I'd like the hard work, and I don't believe it would do any harm to have a member of the firm meet our customers in that region—it would be a good thing all round."

"Yes, I know. But you'd be gone several weeks, Link—months, maybe."

"The longer the better! I want," said Link, "to get the taste of the whole thing out of my mouth."

Major Tom Mackenzie sighed a long, tearing sigh of relief and exhaustion, and, taking out his big handkerchief, quite frankly wiped his eyes.

"Then I think that's the thing to do," he agreed. "And I think day after tomorrow is the day to do it. When does she get back?"

"Day after tomorrow, in the afternoon; she and Mrs Wilson and Inez went to town for Christmas."

"I think you ought to be out of the way, Link."

"I want to be. I'll answer this—" he glanced again at the letter—"tonight," he said. "I'll tell her that she hasn't been frank with me, all the way through, and that married affection ought to be based upon confidence."

"Don't say too much. Just so she gets the idea. Tomorrow, go over and tell Lucy and Otis, have Christmas dinner with us—and make it a

point to tell a few other people, by the way," the father advised, pondering, with a knitted brow. "Then early the next day come down to the office, and I'll have your itinerary and your trip planned for you, and you can get off on the one o'clock train." The older man fell silent, fingering his lip.

"And some day, after I get back," Link began with sudden self-consciousness and awkwardness, "maybe I'll thank you for being so generous to me about it."

"That can wait," his father said, embarrassed. "You've given me a pretty happy Christmas as it is!"

They sat silent a few moments, both staring at the dying fire, father and son strangely alike in the mood of deep abstraction that suddenly possessed them.

"Did Mother look like that when you first met her?" Link asked, after awhile, looking interestedly at the portrait over the mantel, as if he never had seen it before.

"Yes. No—well, yes, she did," his father answered. "But that was painted by an uncle of hers, when she was only eighteen, as I remember the story, and I didn't meet her until she was twenty-two. I had gone East to see my grandmother, in Connecticut; I was a lot older than your mother. My father and I had been in the business here, for years, and he took a sudden notion to go home and see his folks. Your mother, Lucy Swann, came over to the house the first night I was there with my cousin Lizzie, who had married a Swann. Your mother was just about the prettiest thing I ever saw in my life, I thought then. Well," Tom Mackenzie added, grinning, "I don't know as I ever stopped thinking it. Lovely woman—lovely woman. She had on a high white stock, and a white skirt, and her hair was parted in the middle.

"Her family thought a lot of her," he added musingly. "I was thinking, awhile back, that this summer I'd go on and get Margaret, when school closes, and take her up there, and see some of the folks."

"It must have been fun, bringing her West," Link mused, still looking at his mother's portrait, "and settling down here! I don't know, Dad," he went on a little confusedly, "here's something that kinder gets me. There's always been a lot of nice girls in this town, but I never wanted to *marry* any one of 'em until Marianne came along. And then I didn't exactly think about marriage and kids and having a home and all that, I just thought of having *her*."

He stopped, conscious that he was expressing himself awkwardly and obscurely.

"But, now," he added, "I see the whole thing differently. It seems as if, having been so crazy about *her*, I get a different slant on the rest."

"She waked you up, perhaps, Link," his father suggested.

"Maybe. But I wish to God," Link said, with sudden violence, putting his head in his hands again, "I wish to *God* something had waked me up before!"

"I wouldn't say that, Son. If you'd married her," his father said mildly, "you'd have had to make the best of it, like a good many better men have done! As it is, she's the kind of woman who isn't going to die of a broken heart. She's deceived you all the way along, and she wouldn't have stopped, as your wife.

"A woman like that," he added, as Link was silent, "can certainly play hob with a whole town!"

"You wonder," Link confessed boyishly, nervously, "what would have happened if we *had* been married?"

"Just what's happened to a lot of smarter and older men than you are, Link," his father assured him mildly.

The clock struck twelve, but neither man moved. Link continued to sit deep in his low chair, his hands fallen between his knees, his troubled, absent gaze straight ahead. His father rested placidly in the chair opposite, his bald head comfortably thrown back, and his hands spread on the chair arms.

"She liked the idea of a brick house!" the older man said presently, in affectionate satisfaction.

"Mother?"

"Yes, sir. She loved this house. My father had built it about ten years before I was married. The idea was that your mother and I were to have a place of our own, where I built little Lucy's house, a few years ago. But Lucy liked this place, and my mother—she'd been ailing for years—she was tickled to death to have us settle down in here. You children came right along, and we never moved. We built the garage, and the sun porch —sorter fixed things up."

He fell silent, dreaming.

"I'm older than my father was when he quit," he said suddenly, "and I don't know but what I'll step down, pretty soon now, Link. You and Otis have been running things pretty much your own way this year, anyway. I'll take a long vacation. Margaret wrote me the other day—I showed you her letter? I sent it over to Lucy, I guess. Says, 'If you don't take me to Europe pretty soon, some other good-looking fellow will volunteer for the job.' How'd you like to be president of the works for awhile, Link?"

Link looked up with a worried smile.

"Just about long enough to get up here to this room and cut my own throat," he answered fervently. "My Lord, Dad, I have no judgment. There'd be a hundred things a day I couldn't decide."

"You'd have Ote," the older man reminded him, in the pause.

"I know. And Ote's darned smart. But, my *Lord*——" Link protested again.

"Well, well," his father soothed him. "I'll probably be one of these interfering old men who hang around the office long after they've worn out their usefulness. I'd be on your advisory board, maybe. But you useter think you could kind of run things, Link," he suggested, with a

shrewd smile in the gray eyes he narrowed upon his son. "When you first came home from college, you didn't seem to have any of these misgivings about running the business."

"Well, maybe I've learned som'p'n since then," Link said briefly and bitterly, not to be laughed out of his dark mood. "I've made a fool of myself," he added, "and no matter what I do about Marianne, I'll feel like a skunk! She doesn't love me, I don't think she ever loved anybody, but—I don't know——"

"Maybe it's a case of having to act like a skunk now, or having to act like a skunk later, when you've got a couple of kids," his father suggested.

Link laughed scornfully.

"There never would be any 'couple of kids,'" he answered positively. "She—well, I don't suppose you can get a slant at all on a girl like that, Dad, what she wants out of life, and how she goes about getting it."

"I can give a pretty good guess," the older man answered drily, sending a swift, half-humorous glance at his son. "Now here's the whole point, Link," he added, in a brisk and businesslike tone: "you've reached a sort of crossroads in your life. You've got to turn one way or another. And I thank my Maker," added Major Tom, with an upward glance of genuine piety and faith, "that you haven't found all this out too late!"

Link got to his feet.

"I've got some notes to write," he said, in a determined and clear voice. "And I've got some packing to do. I'll be out of here by one o'clock the day after tomorrow, and by the time I come back the whole thing will be over. For the sake of Inez and Mrs Wilson she—Marianne, I mean—won't make any fuss, and later on, sometime, I'll tell her that I'm sorry for the whole thing."

"Well," said the older man, also on his feet, "I'm glad things have taken this turn, Link, I can't say more than that."

Link laughed gruffly.

"I'm glad, too."

"Want any help packing?" his father asked, with a touch of the old nursery attitude toward the children.

"Oh, no, thanks. I don't need anything but a big suitcase, Dad," said Link, in a changed voice, as if he spoke against his own will. He did not look at his father, his elbow was on the low mantelpiece, and he was starting down at the fluff of pinkish-white ash and the last red embers of the fire. "Marriage is a—an irrevocable sort of thing, isn't it?" he said awkwardly.

"Pretty serious," his father answered, a little puzzled, very grave.

"Hang it," Link said boyishly, wretchedly, putting his elbows on the mantel, and burying his face in his hands, "I could have had Barbara Atherton! I know I could. I saw her today—I was riding down that way, we have the same birthday, you know. So pretty—so good—cooking for

that ass and caring for his child! She always had the loveliest laugh in the world."

His father was silent. There was utter stillness in the room.

"Well, too late for that now!" Link said. He rubbed his eyes, sighed, and faced his father again with a philosophic smile.

"Too late for that now," his father agreed gravely.

And in the pause that followed, the little wind whining about the shutters of the brick house seemed to bring a message from the old hacienda down on the flats by the sea. Too late.

CHAPTER XVI

In October and November of the following year there were exactly forty-three days of hard rain. Barbara du Spain counted them, desperately, doggedly, stoically.

Her household was late in getting started every morning, partly because little Kate was a croupy baby, and often kept her parents awake until midnight, partly because the mornings were so dark and dreary that there was no special incentive to rising.

Barry slept alone in the large, damp, plaster-scented room next to the kitchen now, and Barbara and the baby shared the big couch in the kitchen itself. No need, Barbara decided generously, to have both Barry and herself constantly disturbed by the little third member of the family. The kitchen was the only warm place in the house, and little bottles, blankets, and garments could be dried and warmed there most easily.

Sometimes Kate slept in her basket, so close to the couch that her mother's hand could touch her from the bed. Sometimes, as she grew bigger and stronger, she was fenced into the corner with pillows, and spread herself like a little star-fish on the bed.

Either way, Barbara liked to know that a matter of inches, and not walls and door, separated her from her child.

Often the hands of the kitchen clock stood close to nine when she awakened, and stumbled up, in fatigue and sleepiness and chill, to set the machinery of the household in motion. The room would be scented with stale ashes, and very cold, even in October.

Barbara, barefooted, with her tousled braided hair in a loose rope over the shoulder of her flannel nightgown, would kneel at the hearth, pile slender logs upon leaves or crumpled papers. As the first flames sprang up, she would go to the patio doorway, and peer out at the dripping eaves, the packed wet leaves about the old fountain, the dark sky, and the subdued chickens, hunched under the shelter of the wall. Great pools lay everywhere now; the roads were mere riverways, the cattle's hoofs sank inches into mud. On the apple trees and the lilac bushes the last yellow foliage rustled and shook agitatedly in the continual steady downpour.

After the hearth fire, the stove fire was the first duty; it was made with kindling, and short stocky logs of madrone and oak, furiously hot when they once began fairly to burn, but often so damp that they dismally succumbed two or three times before reaching this point.

When this happened, Barbara must open the stove, pick out the smoking dull wood, find paper somewhere to make a fresh start, and go through the whole business again. Meanwhile, she would be shuddering with the cramping cold, ready to cry with the general dampness, darkness, and chill of the room.

The ordinary routine was exacting and troublesome enough; it was exasperating beyond words when any delay occurred. Barbara would go to the dark, cold stove in a sort of fury, slamming the lids about, streaking her bare underarm with soot.

"Oh, my *goodness*, have you gone out again! Oh, *bothcration!*"

The cereal, still merely water and grain powder, would look at her with a cool, lifeless eye; sometimes a little rain of ashes fell upon it, and Barbara would feel absolutely savage as she skimmed off what soot she might, and recklessly stirred the rest into the mixture.

Cold stove plates, cold oven, and cold kettle, the big rambling kitchen dark and chilly, and outside the windows rain falling—falling—falling, on the fuchsia bushes and the shabby, dirty plumes of the pampas grass and the dim red tiles on the patio wall.

Barbara would approach the couch a dozen times to look with a thrill of utter pride and concern at Kate, sprawled luxuriously in the blankets, face down, with a mop of dark curls tumbled over a flushed little velvet-soft cheek.

"You gorgeous darling!" Barbara would whisper, kneeling on the bed beside her, with a hand planted for support on either side of the baby, and her own face lowered to touch the little unconscious one, "you beautiful angel—you!"

And she would return to her work refreshed, as if from mere contact with the baby she drew a mysterious elixir, as indeed she did.

The fire burning noisily now, and a heartening crackle answering from behind the stove plates, the cereal boiling with a satisfactory smacking "blop-blop-blop!" and the milk for Kate's breakfast showing a fine, silky wrinkle in the very center of its creamy expanse, Barbara's own soul would warm with the perceptibly warming air. Her cold hands would become usable again, and the fresh draught of cold air from the quickly opened and closed pantry door be actually welcome.

When the toast was spread on the detached half of an old broiler over the stove it was time to call Barry, for he had only to tumble out of bed, and slip his arms into an old dressing gown, to be ready for breakfast. He would appear with a face still flushed and swollen with sleep, his magnificent mane disheveled and his opening words torn by yawns.

If it was to be a happy day, he would devote himself first to Kate, rolling and tumbling her until she awakened, with all the fresh, clear-

eyed, instant rallying of forces characteristic of a baby's waking, and selecting one of her own much-washed, colorless little blankets in which to wrap her snugly for breakfast.

His own big bare feet he would chafe upon one another, as he ate, if the morning were chilly. It was not until the meal was over that he made any toilet for the day, and Barbara did not always do it then. No use scrubbing and brushing and dressing one's self with all the housework still to do: pots to scrape and soak, crumbs and rubbish to sweep into the fire, dishes to wash and wipe, beds to make, and Kate's laundry work waiting. Everything in the kitchen would be as dirty, as disorderly, and as entirely wrong as possible by this time, and strength and energy were needed to set it right.

One of Barbara's most treasured possessions was a pair of heavy lambskin slippers, lined with the untouched wool, and stitched into clumsy shape, in a single piece. She had bought them at the Milo store, in early days, and she wore them all morning long, on her bare feet, and sometimes in the evenings too.

To sweep the wet, dirty tiling that connected the kitchen with the patio, to make flying trips to the rubbish box, to penetrate to the ice-cold pantries and storerooms, the slippers, dirty and shabby now, were her comfort and stay. Barry had a pair of heelless rattan Chinese slippers, which he lost over and over again.

Sometimes Barbara merely put a skirt and sweater over her nightgown, and worked about the kitchen until nearly noon; leaving the dishes to minister to the baby, stopping on her way back to the sink to put the couch in order, remembering the necessary soaking of beans or stewing of prunes, and delaying once more to attend to it, feeding the fires, rushing out into the blowing rain and wind to give the chickens their hot breakfast, stopping there to clean a water dish or gather a few warm brown eggs, and returning breathless to the kitchen to find Kate whimpering aggrievedly in her home-made high chair and the deserted dishes cooling and half done on the sink.

Whenever Kate whimpered, everything else had to wait, and Barbara loved the moments that gave her any excuse to gather the delicious little draggled armful of baby and doublegown and silky curls into her arms and drop into a chair for a few exquisite minutes of mothering.

A shuddering cold session in Barry's room, and another out-of-doors trip, when a basketful of wet wash was pinned to dry in a big empty hay barn, and Barbara would realize, with a pang of dismay, that the clock said twelve. Noon! And Barry always came out of his writing den behind the chimney at about one, ravenous, and often impatient.

Still in her nightgown, sweater, skirt, and lambskin slippers, she must clear the way for lunch. The kitchen was in fair order now, couch neat, washing out of the way, sink cleared. But lunch would spread disorder again.

Lunch! And an inspection of the cold bowls of congealed food in the

cy pantry. She knew them all so well! Mashed yellow turnip. He said he vas sick of it. Boiled onions, glazed and transparent and oozing gray water, it was too soon to have them again. Soup with cold islands of fat floating on it—well, they could have soup. But no use taking those baked apples into the kitchen; Barry hadn't touched a baked apple for weeks, and as for the remainder of the pot roast, standing dry, brown, and splinery on a heavy chipped dish, denuded of the gravy, carrots, and potatoes that had once graced it and that Barbara had scraped away for other uses, it didn't look like food at all!

She would sniff at it ungratefully. As meat, as possible nutriment and sustenance, it could not conscientiously be thrown out.

"Aren't you ever going to sour?" Barbara would ask it disgustedly.

Soup. What could she put in the soup to make it interesting? Her mind would travel over all her jars and boxes and shelves. Rice was always good. Toasted strips of bread were always good. And then she could have the tea upon which she had come actually to depend, and Barry could have a fried egg sandwich.

"Summer—it's six months to summer," Barbara would reflect, appalled. "Why can't we have corn and tomatoes and melons all the year round?"

At the best of times, feeding Barry was a problem, for a part of his unreasonableness and inconsistency was displayed in his impatience with monotonous or limited bills of fare, and yet he would neither encourage Barbara to experiment with her own original ideas in the matter, nor recognize the fact that their extremely uncertain financial standing was the real trouble, after all.

Barbara herself felt a certain instinctive gallantry in the matter. She could not bring herself to reproach Barry for their constant state of bankruptcy; she had married him; he was doing the best he could, and he was only a dreamy, crazy, irresponsible boy of a poet, after all.

"Barry, you always say you admire the peasants of southern Europe so much. And *they* have one-dish meals!"

"They're different."

"I don't see why they're different. I'll bet you that, if we cut down our menus, had just macaroni or rice, with sauces and bread, the way they do, you'd enjoy your meals much more."

"Don't be silly, Barbara. I'm working hard, and I've got to eat. I need meat and potatoes and coffee and puddings."

"But, Barry, you don't *enjoy* them!"

"I didn't enjoy that dam' prune shortcake yesterday because I'm sick of it. You give me onion soup, and then prune shortcake, and I say that they're all right, they're fine, only we've got to have fried potatoes and chicken, or something else hearty, too."

"Barry, in that soup, and that dessert, with our cream, there was enough nourishment for a prize fighter! Heavy yellow cream, and biscuit crust, cheese, toast and onions in the soup——

"But, of course, he doesn't get really hungry," Barbara would add to herself, when he had flung himself furiously out of the room. "To a man who was really hungry, Kate," she would inform the baby, "onion soup and prune shortcake would be a *feast!*"

Sometimes she got angry in her turn.

"Well, look here, Barry du Spain, if I could buy grapefruit, sand dabs, and crabmeat I'd do it; I'd get cakes at the Women's Exchange, and mayonnaise and asparagus, if I could! I do the best I can. I've killed every chicken we can spare—they're all layers, now, every one of them, and we can't get along without eggs, to say nothing of raising pullets in the spring. I put up fruit last year until we couldn't afford another ounce of sugar, and I put up corn and tomatoes until I nearly had sunstroke, working in this boiling place day after day! I do every bit of work, and all the washing——"

But when she was roused to this rare exhibition of feeling, she was the first to appreciate its futility; Barry could always carry off the victory; he was impervious to influence, he neither listened to her nor assimilated her meaning, and when she paused for breath he would say:

"You're an ungrateful, unappreciative woman. All you have to do is take care of *one* room—one single room, for nothing is ever done in the bedroom; you have milk and eggs and fruit and vegetables right from your own place, and I'm always here to bring in wood and do anything you ask me! Dam' few men would work around their wives' kitchens and play nurse to teething kids the way I do! Now I'm trying to sell my first real play, the New York producers are waiting for it, they sent it back for me to make some changes, and you begin to raise hell because you can't buy canned asparagus. . . ."

It would hammer her down, it would exhaust her, there was no end to it. He was all right, she was all wrong. He had given her a million evidences of tenderness and devotion, she had crushed them under her heel. He hoped to God that she and her kid would get out and leave him alone, and let some other man take hold of her, and beat her to death when she treated him that way!

If his accusations led her to counter attack, only time and energy were wasted. In the early months of their marriage, a simple sense of justice had sometimes tempted her into fierce retaliation. And there had followed long, bitter silences between the two.

Barry, under the circumstances, had suffered much less than Barbara. He felt all emotions, joy and sorrow, love and hate, violently but briefly, and Barbara used to marvel sometimes, telling herself that quarreling actually seemed to refresh him. He would plunge into a dispute easily, readily, passionately, and when he had raged himself breathless, he could sulk and be silent for days, if he willed it. But it never kept him awake at night or deprived him of his appetite.

It was Barbara who lay wakeful, hour after hour, analyzing and pon-

dering the situation, crying in despair; it was to Barbara that food became tasteless and repellent.

And after awhile she learned that silence was her only weapon, and that if she could school herself to let him rave and storm, hurl at her one ridiculous accusation after another and finally slam himself out of the room, a blessed calm would follow, and an interval of reflection on his part, in which to his bewilderment he would realize for the first time that she had not given him a provocative word or glance.

Then it was that he would come to her, at first suspicious and sulky, then placating, finally apologetic—last of all he would become her penitent little boy, his beautiful face pale with sorrow and contrition, his devotion and affection and service only waiting to be poured out for her, in restitution for the pain he had given her.

In this mood he would want to plan something elaborate by way of thanksgiving: a whole day on the shore, or a superlative banquet, quite half of which he himself would prepare.

Barberry Bush must make a cake, he would stuff tomatoes and cut the sandwiches; they would go far down the shore—they would have a divine day. No use to protest that she had meant to do some washing that day, or burn the brush. This might have meant his complete return to yesterday's or that morning's black mood.

So they would go off to the shore with a luncheon and their books, and the beautiful blue hours would drift lazily above their heads, while Barbara stared at the sea and dreamed, and Barry read to her, or laid his head on her knee and let her fingers stroke his dark hair while he told her how passionately he loved her; more than any man had ever loved any woman in the world before.

The baby might naturally have complicated these idyllic sequels to controversy, but by the time Kate came, Barbara had somewhat learned to manage Barry, and occasions of unpleasantness were few and far between. Indeed, before the second winter in the hacienda shut down upon them, she was confronting serious problems, and had reached the point, in her own secret heart at least, when she appreciated that Barry would not now, or at any time, be of the slightest use in helping her to solve them. Barry and his tantrums didn't signify—*couldn't* signify as all-important now. There was Kate to think of, and there would be another baby when June came round, and they had no money at all.

This had always sounded a great joke, during the days when Barbara's father had paid the household expenses, when she and Amy had had good salaries, and when Barry had been regarded as a sort of luxury in the household, a delightful reader of poems and player of games.

But now it was the burning anxiety that haunted all her waking and sleeping hours. Not enough money. Not enough money!

Weeks ago they had sold to Tomas their cows, all except the one for which Barbara now cared, in their own barn. Kate was the least ex-

acting of babies, but she had to have her first boots and first coat, after all; some money, not much, was owing to Maria Bettancourt and her mother, for nursing and housework during Kate's first weeks of life, and there was a modest doctor's bill still owing to Dr Bonner.

What could they do? Barbara asked herself desperately, over and over. Money was needed every day, all the time; nobody in the world could get along without a little money.

With Kate and with the old hacienda to manage and Barry's meals to cook, with the cow and chickens to keep, she could not possibly go back to Cottonwood and to her old job. Barry said comfortably that he would sell a couple of poems, and he did sell one or two, modestly. But the return from these was less than fifty dollars, and three persons could not expect that to last long.

In the spring there would be one hundred and eighty-three dollars to pay for taxes; there was talk of road assessment, there was a premium to be paid on insurance. They might let the insurance lapse; not much that could happen to batter and bruise the old place had not happened, in these neglected years, but there were always fences. If Barry did not fence, and stray cows wandered upon his property, and fell into the old creek culvert, for instance, Barry might get into trouble with excitable Latin neighbors.

Barbara, with Barry's reluctant help, painted a neat sign: "This Ranch for Sale," and they nailed it to the highway fence. But theirs was a little-traveled road, and no tourist car, flying by in autumn's scented brown dust, or in the summer's wreathing fogs, ever came to inquire about it. It was heavily mortgaged anyway; on the day they had gone into Cottonwood to buy Kate's shoes, lamp wicks, a new cullender, typewriter ribbons, and curry powder, they had stopped in at the Bank, to speak, laughingly and carelessly, about a second mortgage. But old Miller at the Bank had told them that it was out of the question. Bad year for property in these parts.

Kate had been very winning, on this occasion, beaming at everyone indiscriminately. Her little shoes had been adorable on the fat brown feet that for nine months had gone bare, and Barbara had felt almost weak with the excitement of being in real streets again, with real shop windows to look into, and all the familiar bustle and noise about her, after so many isolated, quiet months.

Every one of Barbara's own old crowd had evidently gone to the rodeo, but Miss Mitchell in the Post Office was eager to come out and see the baby, and on all sides there had been half-remembered acquaintances, clerks and neighbors, the big policeman near the Park, and various mothers whose children Barbara had taught: enough friendly faces and voices to make Barbara feel that she belonged here and was home again.

At the Post Office there had been a check for Barry, whose mail had never been forwarded to Milo, and that had spread an atmosphere of real triumph over the day. They had driven home in the August sunset light

delighted with the whole adventure. The old surrey, borrowed from Tomas, had creaked somewhat, but Kate had slept the sleep of social exhaustion on her mother's lap, and Barry had been deliciously facetious with Stella, the mare.

That had been in August. But when September came, and October, Barbara's heart somewhat failed her. She was physically miserable, she felt unequal to the demand of the long, wet, dark days, with Kate more and more imperiously in need of care, and the prospect of the cold winter months all ahead. Fifty dollars a month—twenty-five indeed, would have made all the difference between uneasiness and discomfort and comparative security. But that fifty, that twenty-five, they did not have.

A sense of failure began to gnaw at Barbara's very soul. They never should have married; they were mad to have married. A man like Barry was never intended for any woman's husband.

Granted. Granted. But now that the mistake had been made, what must she do? There was some way out. They were not, presumably, to remain on the ranch for days and weeks, and to starve together in a dismal heap.

She wrote Amy that she was learning so many things, and changing so fast, that she suffered from growing pains. The sharp realities of life, the bitter necessities, developed her painfully, bewildered her sometimes, as if they had been a succession of blows.

To write her father, and ask him for money? But she couldn't do that! Her father had a small pension, and the rent of the bungalow in Cottonwood. But he was not a young man now, and of late he had been spending odd intervals, between lectures, in a sort of hotel sanitarium in the south, which was sunshiny, comfortable, and beneficial indeed, but far from cheap.

"It sounds so easy, when other married couples do it," Barbara mused. "I've heard fathers and mothers say that Mary or Tom had written to ask for money, that things had gone wrong with them. But I can't! Not just for bread and sugar and soap. If it were to tide us over some crisis——

"It sounds so easy," she mused, in another mood, "to say, 'They're going to have another baby!' But what it means—*always*—to some woman. Two children—why, that's nothing! Women used to have fifteen and sixteen. But when it's *yourself* that has to face it—that's different!

"Perhaps women in Cottonwood are talking about me, now," she reflected, as her thoughts took still another turning, "perhaps they're saying that I didn't marry very well, that he's not much of a provider. And how little *that* used to mean when they said it of some other girl! I remember Lorraine Carter, who threw herself away, everyone said, on the boy whose father had the victrola agency. They lived in a little cottage down near Chinatown and I never even went to see her—poor Lorraine! She had four babies and did her own work. Only somehow I never realized it, then. They used to say—the old women who sit on porches and talk used to say—that Lorraine looked so old and shabby and worried.

"Well, I suppose we women will do it, and go on doing it, until the end of time, when we fall in love!"

And then the inevitable question: "But did I really fall in love? Did I ever love Barry? Did I know anything about it?"

But that Barbara could not answer. It was of no consequence now, anyway. She was married, and she loved her bad, old, exacting, unreasonable Barry dearly, and Kate was the very core of her heart. What did preliminaries signify? The one wise thing now was to make the best of what was, rather than to speculate about what might—or might not—have been.

And what could a strong, healthy woman of twenty-four, with a small baby in her arms, and another baby coming, do to help out the family income, or rather do to create a family income, to begin with?

Nothing, at a distance of twelve miles of country road from the nearest town. Under the circumstances she could hardly open a hotel in the hacienda; without a bathroom or electric lights or gas she could not even take a boarder. And to get into town every day meant a car; even if the winter roads had been passable, or Barbara's health, or Kate's age, at all suitable to a business career.

Patience was the only thing now, and Barbara strove for it with more steadfast, determined courage than she had brought to any previous crisis in her life. The event must be approaching her steadily, the change, the solution, and she must have faith in it, and in herself, and above all in Barry. They would look back upon this time some day with amusement and pity.

But it was hard to have him so cross, so bitter and hopeless. He seemed bewildered and overwhelmed by the increasing responsibilities he had assumed, and it was galling to Barbara to realize, far more clearly than he did, that just at present she was far more of a liability than an asset. Her cheerfulness fell flat, her bright confident dreams of their future only deepened the annoyed and impatient cloud on his face, and his despondency increased day after day.

One evening in early November he came in late for supper, but showed so unusually jovial and contented a mood that Barbara knew it must have some definite explanation, that the change had never been caused by one of his long walks on the cliffs.

It appeared that he had gone into town, walking the highway at first, later been given a lift by a kindly tourist. He had seen old friends, and even stopped in for a little while at the moving picture theater; he had had a late lunch with the Wilsons. Inez was not well, was going to have another operation on her throat, and was delighted to welcome him, and hear the news of Barbara and the baby. Her cousin Marianne was still there; he hadn't seen Marianne, but Lucy Barnard had a new baby. Link Mackenzie had been away almost all summer, but was back now, and everyone said that Dr Bonner had sent for Ward Duffy, to ask him to come share his practice with him, and that in that case Ward and Amy

would of course live in Cottonwood. And, finally, Barry had had another lift all the way home.

Barbara was delighted and excited by the unexpected event. She cross-examined him about everything and everybody, and exclaimed joyously a hundred times about the rumor that concerned Amy. Think of having Amy and Ward back!

It seemed to promise better things somehow, that Barry was happier, that the Wilsons had been so hospitable, that there was no immediate talk of a marriage between Marianne and Link, and that, above all, darling Amy, whose position as a merely prospective mother made Barbara feel herself centuries older than her older sister, might be back here in Cottonwood, where Barbara might often go to spend the day with her.

"And, Barry, we could have Amy down here for a real visit in summer! Imagine that, I haven't seen her since before her wedding. And that was almost two years ago."

"Sure we will," Barry conceded graciously. Barbara had waited to share her supper with him, and his long drive had made it seem a delicious supper. Now, in lamplight, her satiny cheeks were blazing, her shining bronze hair loosened, and her dark blue apron set off her white skin and high color to perfection. "I wish you always looked as pretty as you do at dinner," he said significantly. But his face clouded as a resentful expression came into her eyes.

"Cleaning up, and washing for Kate," she countered, displeased, "feeding chickens and raking out the barn!"

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, fight about everything!" Barry said viciously, jerking away from the table and from the fingers she instantly extended.

But she would not let him escape. The tale of his trip to Cottonwood was not half told, and she must cross-examine him again.

"Ah, don't—stay where you are! I only meant that I'd love always to be dainty and pretty, if I could. But I get myself into old boots and sweaters because the work is so dirty. Tell me, did you happen to see Fox or Harry?"

Barry, mollified by her apologetic tone, readily began again, and Barbara, with Kate drowsing comfortably in her arms, listened and questioned him from beginning to end once more. The dishes cooled, the fires burned low, and a soft wind cried about the roof of the hacienda. And Barbara, enthralled with the details of what had been to her only the everyday lives of commonplace and uninteresting neighbors a year or two ago, thought that Barry was more like himself tonight than she had seen him in months, and that it was a fortunate impulse that had taken him toward town today.

"And Link and Marianne didn't make a match of it, after all?"

"No. They say that's all off."

"She *did* get her divorce last spring, I know. It was in the paper."

"Well, I don't know why they didn't, but anyway, they didn't get married. Lucy told Inez the other day that she thought Margaret and her

father were going abroad, after Christmas, and that Link'll be president of the whole business. Crown Prince stuff."

"Oh, I don't know. He's been working with the firm, awfully hard, ever since he left college—four or five years now!" Barbara reminded him leniently.

This was the first time. But when, in a few days, Barry went to town again, and again had an exhilarating and absorbing afternoon with old friends, Barbara felt an odd sense of being hurt—of being slighted.

The third time, again only a few days later, he stayed away all night. Barbara waited for her supper until about eight o'clock, ate it philosophically with a book propped before her and with Kate's sociable gurgles from the center of the couch keeping company with the eternal soft drip-drip-drip of the rain on the patio tiles.

But, philosophical or not, she did not like it. Barry got home, in the morning of the following day, rosy and soaking wet, cheerfully apologetic and matter-of-course. He brought a breath of fresh, cold air into the kitchen, was rapturous over the baby, and sat chatting with his wife in an unwontedly friendly and pleasant mood. Barbara, fighting inner resentment, went on with her preparations for lunch and her general straightening of the kitchen, and tried to display only her usual manner.

"You weren't worried or anxious last night, Barberry Bush?"

"Oh, no. I had Kate, I was all right."

"Everyone in town was asking about you."

"That was nice." She heard the lifelessness, the uninterestedness of her own tone; but it couldn't be helped. To speak honestly now would be to reproach him.

"I stayed with Fox—Harry was there, and we played rummy. I've not played rummy with those boys for years!"

"I thought you loathed Harry Poett." She couldn't help saying it; some ugly impulse stronger than herself spoke in her place.

"Harry? No. He's nice enough. I've always been fond of Harry!" And the maddening thing was that Barry believed what he was saying. Barbara told herself that she should be thankful that he was outgrowing his prejudices against the Cottonwood folk.

He made himself charmingly companionable and useful on this particular occasion. He brought wood and carried away ashes, swept the tiles of the patio vigorously, and was ravenously and appreciatively ready for lunch. He was, for an hour or two, in fact, the old, silly, happy Barry, the Barry she had lost for dreary, struggling months. But it was a part of Barbara's dark mood that she resented this, too. He *could* be gracious and helpful, when he wanted to, he could control his temperament, and make life agreeable for her. The trouble usually was that he did not care to make the effort.

It was hard to listen to him interestedly, smilingly, to agree with him over and over again that his visit had been most fortunate.

Yet what else could she do? To insist that he remain down here at

the hacienda beside her, idling, fretting, quarreling, just because she was unable to accompany him into town, was to put herself into the ranks of the jealous, narrow-minded women who acted the part of dogs in the manger with their men. No, he had his life and his interests, and she must shape her own independently.

True, she reflected, forcing herself to calm and amiability, she might remind him that his work needed him. But Barry quite innocently deprived her of this argument by plunging into the re-making of his play with great zest, exulting that his holiday had rested and refreshed him, had given him quite a new point of view on *Napoleon Third.*

And this weapon he presently took from her hand to use in his own. A week later he complained of being jaded, and began, with quite obvious diplomacy, to speak longingly of the stimulus the visit to Cottonwood had given him.

He thought he would take a long walk. Perhaps would take the highway, and if he did get into town, did Barbara need anything at the dry goods store or grocery?

She was too proud to protest. They were lingering at the luncheon table, at about two o'clock, when he introduced the subject skillfully. Barbara made no comment. She went on carefully feeding baked potato to the rapturous Kate.

"Goog!" said Kate emphatically, working her rosy little mouth.

"By golly, she said 'good'!" Barry exclaimed, with exaggerated enthusiasm, grateful to his daughter for the diversion.

Barbara raised heavy eyes. She felt sick, despondent, beaten.

"Oh, yes, she says 'good' now!"

"She's going to be a beauty," Barry commented, staring at Kate absorbedly, and choosing to affect that he had forgotten the other important topic. But Barbara would not let him off.

"If you do go into town, Barry, will you be back tonight?"

He assumed an air of casual surprise.

"Oh, I may not take the highway at all! I'll tell you," he added, with the manner of an air of thinking it out, "if at any time I'm not here at seven—I don't mean tonight, or any special night—but if I'm not here at seven, go ahead without me!"

"I see. No more—*aw* gone!" Barbara said to the baby, exhibiting the empty spoon and plate. Kate's wide baby eyes roved the table reproachfully, she liked potato. When Barbara presented her with a spoonful of apple sauce instead, she put her little cherry of a lower lip forward, and tears brimmed her eyes. "Bad!" she said.

Regarding Barry's movements there seemed to be nothing to say. No reason why he shouldn't take a walk through the heavy, muddy fields and roads, if he liked, no reason why, if he got a lift, he shouldn't go into town, and no real reason why he should not stay there overnight.

The one real argument against all this, love for his wife and child, and the need and desire to be with them, apparently did not enter into the

matter at all—knowing Barry, one would know that it could not enter in. Barbara was not well, now, she was overworked and worried, physically handicapped, and made a prisoner by Kate's needs, and Barry, in the heavy winter weather, found no special amusement at home.

He made a great show of bringing in loads of wood, of helping her in quite unnecessary ways. Kate played placidly with clothespins, the clock struck three, and the first sunshine that had found the ranch for weeks broke from a lemon-colored streak of clear sky, under the black, woolly clouds that were assembling and moving in the southwest. A wind, warm and wet and noisy, went over the world like a sail.

Suddenly Barbara became aware that Barry was watching the clock. He meant not only to get away, but to get away at a special moment; he was keeping an appointment with someone.

When he had put on his muffler and coat, and pulled down his cap, when he had kissed her affectionately and remarked with elaborate carelessness: "I may be back in half an hour!" and when she was left alone with the baby, Barbara, obeying a sudden impulse, went up the patio's outside stairway, packed with wet leaves, and entered one of the dark, damp bedrooms above.

Through the slits of its shutters she could look out across a flat pasture to the east, where, a quarter of a mile away, the Bettancourt cabin stood under some dismal plumes of eucalyptus, and the highway wound between two shabby lines of fencing.

There were pools in the fields today, the trees in the garden were still dripping. But over all the world the yellow sunshine poured in a sparkling flood.

On the road near the Bettancourts', a muddy car was waiting: Fox Madison's Ford. And toward it the figure of Barry, in his shabby overcoat, with his cap pulled down, was making its way.

"Well, what of it?" Barbara asked herself hardily, returning to the dark, warm kitchen that smelled of potatoes and sour milk. "What of it? I suppose that, in his place, I'd do the same thing! And after all, I'm not Barry—I'm me. The thing for me to do is work my own way out, not his!"

She bundled Kate warmly, buttoned on her own sweater, and climbed into her big boots. A fuzzy tam-o'-shanter finished the costume; Barry and Fox had not gone a mile upon their way before she and the baby were busy in the farmyard, raking, singing, splashing about vigorously.

The exercise brought Barbara's brilliant color back to her face, she felt better than she had felt in weeks. The baby, just a year old, had found her own feet now, and staggered and tumbled about delightedly, tottering after fowls, spattering in mud with a kitchen spoon, and making Barbara laugh with her incoherent jabber of conversation.

"Dabber-dabber-dabber!" she responded, kneeling down upon a freshly swept tile to wipe the small nose firmly and kiss the red little mouth that

was never still. Kate, a fat little eager woollen sausage, was getting to be a real companion.

They made a glorious bonfire, Barbara bringing armfuls of dry hay from the barn to get it well started. The smoke, rising in thick blue columns from under strips of wet matting and masses of wet leaves, rose in wild banners on the fresh, sweet winds.

Maria Bettancourt picked her way across the spongy fields, three of the seven little Bettancourts hopping, slipping, and plunging along beside her.

"Make fire, huh?" Maria said superfluously, slinging her babies over the fence expertly, and climbing it stoically herself.

"Oh, I'd have opened the gate!" Barbara called hospitably.

"Is nize, the sunshine," the Portuguese woman commented admiringly with the long whine that finished all her sentences, on the last syllable.

"Nice!" Barbara echoed, laughing. She told herself that she had almost forgotten that there was a sun. But conversation with Maria was necessarily limited.

The babies toddled about together; the two women companionably raked and swept and ordered the little farmyard. Useless to do only this, of course, Barbara reflected, as she had so often reflected. Useless to clean only this tiny space, among all the shabby barns and corrals and paddocks, fences and outhouses and sheds.

Yet it was pleasant to be out in the yard in the winter sunshine, pleasant to see her baby for the first time an independent person among other persons; shouting at the rooster, and dragging valiantly at the rope upon whose other end the Bettancourt baby was dragging with equal determination.

And Maria had a letter for her; the real reason for the call. It was from Link Mackenzie. Barbara rested her rake against the side of the chicken house, wiped her muddy hand upon her sweater, and opened it with a little thrill of pleasure.

Dear Barbara:

Would your baby like an Airedale puppy? Queenie surprised us with four beauties a day or two ago—all males. If Kate would like it, I'll bring it or send it down. I hope you farmers like this weather; everyone here is sick of it. See you soon.

Link.

That was all. But it seemed to make the whole world bright and happy for Barbara. It was like Link to think of this, and to remember her baby's name.

The warm pleasantness of it remained with her all through the quiet lonely hours when Maria had plodded home again, and when the winter dusk had come. Barbara milked the cow, raked her down some hay, and carried the milk pail into the kitchen, with Kate balanced and kicking vigorously on the free arm.

The wind had died away, the air was much colder, and there was a

clear yellow sunset across the quiet, lead-colored sea. A milky mist, low on the wet ground, indicated that there would be frost; the milk must stand in the inner pantry. It was good to shut the heavy doors tonight, to pile wood on the fire, to feel that the old hacienda was a veritable fortress against the weather.

Barbara had forgotten Barry for the moment. But after a serene supper, shared by the animated Kate, whose beautiful eyes shone like stars in the soft evening lights, and after a placid night, and the unusual luxury of a bath before breakfast, Barbara was angered and agitated again—and was distressed to find herself becoming so—by the chance discovery of an opened envelope in the wood box.

It was from the office of *To-day's Verse,* a little magazine whose editor was a great admirer of Barry. It was dated ten days earlier; and within it was a brief, cordial note. Mr du Spain would please find enclosed a check for eighteen dollars, in payment for his sonnet, "The Bad Baby."

Barbara stood with the note in her hand, absolutely transfixed with anger and surprise. Then she burned it and went slowly about her morning work again.

But not in the bright mood in which the sunny, clear frosty morning had first found her. She was sick with a sense of helpless resentment and shock. He had gotten a check for eighteen dollars and had concealed it. He was spending it now, perhaps, on a poker hand. And she and the baby—and the new baby——!

"This is bad for me!" she said aloud, as gusts of uncontrollable rage physically shook her. What did it matter, eighteen dollars? No life was either made or unmade by eighteen dollars.

"Barry, why did you deceive me about that poem that *To-day's Verse* took, and about meeting Fox Madison in the road yesterday?" she burst out suddenly, hours later.

She had borne all she could bear since his return; she had been amiable, friendly, and interested until she could put a force upon herself no longer. Barry had appeared at about seven o'clock, once again vivacious and sweet-tempered, full of town gossip, and eager to be of use. Again he had heaped her wood box and praised her cooking; he had looked well, and had been full of his own peculiarly charming animation and high spirits.

He appeared unruffled, but she saw the color creep up under his clear skin at her first questions.

"I forgot the check," he admitted. "But where did you think I got the money to buy the new meat-chopper and Kate the little hot-water bag?" he added reproachfully. He had brought them both gifts; Barry was wonderfully sympathetic in his choice of presents. "I owed Tomas three dollars," he went on, and Barbara knew from his tone that he felt he was making his case and was gaining confidence, "and yesterday, walking over to his house, to pay it, I saw Fox in the road."

"Waiting!" Barbara supplied bitterly.

"Waiting nothing, he was stuck in the mud. I helped him get loose, and he drove me into town—that was all!"

She did not believe it, but there was no way of proving anything.

"How could you give Tomas three dollars out of an eighteen-dollar check!" Her tone was still hostile and distrustful.

"I thought Tomas could cash it."

Barry had her on every point; she was quite helpless in his hands. And the dispute had only served to rouse him to a sort of smoldering ugliness. He was waiting, now, for the opportunity for trouble.

"Gee, you have a high opinion of me!" he muttered, wiping a lamp he had just filled. "My golly, I go into town once a month, and sit in a little baby game of poker with a couple of men friends, and you ride me for it as if I were a thief! I was going to tell you anyway, because I picked up a little money last night."

Barbara, like many an older and wiser wife, could not resist this good news.

"Barry, did you win?"

"Yep. Not much. But I won about seven dollars."

And quite simply and boyishly, as was customary with him when he had any money, he began to go through his pockets, and meekly surrendered his very last cent.

She did not like to take it, she loathed the position of the sharpeyed wife who quarrels about money, but, as so often in other ways, he forced her here—she *must* have it, if the crazy bark of their matrimonial experiment were ever to make port at all.

The rest of that week went well; in the mornings Barry worked hard and happily, and he and Barbara were out of doors, farming with the baby, in the cold, sharp, sunny afternoons. Professor Atherton sent his daughter twenty-five dollars, to buy Kate something for Christmas, and Kate's parents joyfully appropriated the money and thanked the unconscious, beaming baby with great ceremony.

CHAPTER XVII

On sunday Harry Poett came down, to be delightfully friendly with Barbara, charming with the baby—Barbara noted that Barry made no objection to the customary "Uncle Harry" here—and full of a new scheme for Barry.

She listened, at first skeptically, then eagerly, serving her eggs suzette and her tapioca pudding. Harry ate ravenously and praised everything, and talked all the time. He wanted Barry and Barbara to move into Cottonwood again, Barry to take a half-day job with his own real estate firm.

"You don't have to work mornings!" Harry assured him enthusiastically. "You can write poetry, mornings. And in the afternoon show people the Manor Farmlets—they sell themselves, I tell you! Barbara'd be

among her old crowd—they tell me Amy and Ward are coming up . . ."

The girl's heart soared at the idea. Oh, it didn't matter how plain a cottage they had to take, how poor they were, how many opportunities the gossips were given to say that Barbara Atherton hadn't made much of a match of it, that she was pretty "small potatoes," these days! Just to be back among voices and people, electric lights and telephone bills, sidewalks and gas stoves again! Just to get a daily paper, to have one's eggs delivered in a box, one's milk in a bottle once more!

"Barry'd get eighty-five," she mused.

"Yep, to start with. But commissions, Barbara!" Harry answered eagerly. "He'd make a lot on the side."

"We'd have to pay twenty-five rent," Barbara mused.

"Well, yes, you'd have to pay that," Harry admitted. And Barbara saw that he secretly had thought that they would have to pay more.

"That's what Mrs Ossler pays, down near the Union High School," she continued.

"Well, yes—if you'd live there, Barbara," Harry said doubtfully, in the tone of one who would not.

"Oh, in a minute!" she answered, with a confident laugh.

"Well, then!" Harry said, brightening. And immediately he added, to Barry, carelessly: "You couldn't come into town with me now and see Holliday? He's always at home, Sunday afternoons, and you could have a little talk."

"Why, I don't know—I hate to leave Barberry Bush all by herself," Barry answered hesitatingly.

Fired with brighter hopes than she had known for two long years, Barbara, however, insisted upon their both departing at once, without an instant's delay. Leave the dishes—she could do the dishes, she had nothing else to do!

"And, please, please, Barry darling, talk as if you were a Napoleon of finance," she pleaded, with her final kiss. "Make Holliday think you can sell seven lots a day!"

"If Barry sold seven lots a day he'd make about—let's see, he'd make about fifteen hundred a week," Harry told her.

"Harry Poett, he would not!"

"He would, I tell you! Where do you suppose people like the Mackenzies pick up their millions? Old Tom Mackenzie plotted the whole of the Wilkinson tract twenty years ago, and you know they practically owned Las Haciendas. Barry'll be on easy street, if he'll just get into it now—at the start!"

"If you hear a proud, lordly honk outside the gate tomorrow, it's me returning in my Royce," said Barry. Barbara's happy laughter followed them on their way.

She attacked her housework in a very whirl of high spirits, when they were gone. What mattered it how she and Barry made their reappearance in Cottonwood, so that they were there? The ignorant girl who

had been Barbara Atherton might have had her silly ideas about social standing and desirable neighborhoods, but Barbara du Spain was entirely cured of any such superficial notions. Just to have a sunny dooryard for her babies, neighbors, a grocery at the corner, a bookstore and public library down the street, would be enough for Barbara du Spain for a long, long time.

Suppose Marianne and Inez *did* come to see her, and found Mrs Ossler's cottage, with its modest sign "Modes," on one side of Barbara's house, and Jean Charpentier's glass-roofed nurseries on the other? Marianne and Inez mattered to her no longer; they were rich, they might have their own standards and luxuries if they would. But they could not keep Barbara from happiness, from sunshine and friends, from studies and books, from an occasional lecture and concert and play.

She visualized the cottage; those cottages had about six rooms apiece. Two bedrooms, study, parlor, dining room, and kitchen—why, although the hacienda had many rooms, some score or more, that would be much more space than the Du Spains were using now!

An old-fashioned cottage with bay windows and side porches, with cheap wood in the floors and china door knobs. But never mind, if Barry was making a definite eighty-five dollars a month in real estate, and perhaps more from poems and commissions, that plain little wooden dwelling, with the paint chipping, and the cheap frame of strips of colored glass about the front door, would be Paradise itself to Barry's wife.

And then, if Amy were there, with the baby who was expected in April, and if the sisters could be together every day, in the dear old fashion, and if the little cousins could be friends——

"Oh, my God," Barbara prayed, stopping short in the middle of the kitchen and covering her face with her hands. "Oh, my God, if this could happen! If this could happen!"

And she knelt down by Kate's chair, and after the inevitable preliminary of wiping Kate's crust-daubed face, kissed her soft little hands enthusiastically.

"I don't know anything about your brother, Kate, or about Aunt Amy's baby. But if our family, or any other, ever produces anything as gorgeously beautiful as you are, I'll immediately force you to take the veil—you hear me, now!"

Kate said "mom-mom-mom" something more than a hundred times, adding a type of gurgle that was new. The probability of her being cloistered appeared remote; Barry's extraordinary beauty was reincarnate in her creamy skin, apricot cheeks, and silky mass of dark curls. But the big eyes, with their upcurved fringe of heavy lashes, were as blue as Barbara's own.

"You," said Barbara aloud, studying her, "shall have milk toast and prunes for your supper. And I'll have toast and tea and prunes. And tomorrow Daddy'll be home, to tell us all about moving into Cottonwood, California!"

But when Barry came home the next day he brought a guest with him, and there was no more talk of real estate, commissions, a move into town, or the little cottages down near Mrs Ossler.

The guest was named Schofield; Barbara never heard him called anything else, and never knew whether it was a first or last name. She had heard the name often; he was one of the Bohemian group that sometimes entertained Barry in San Francisco. He was a small, weedy man of perhaps forty, a poet, in a small way, himself, and foremost among Barry's admirers.

Schofield had come, by a coincidence, to Cottonwood, on this same Monday morning, in the hope of getting in touch with Barry du Spain. And upon disembarking from the train, his eyes had fallen upon Barry.

Barbara gathered that they had spent what remained of the morning together, talking, and had lunched at the cafeteria. They had walked all the way to the ranch, still talking. They were in high spirits, and Schofield proved a comfortable and informal guest; Barbara's first apologies were thrown away on him, as even Barbara perceived. He helped intelligently in the kitchen and made an instant conquest of the baby.

"Are you a married man, Mr Schofield?"

"Yes, ma'am. I've got to call this girl 'Barbara,' Barry. Old enough to be her father!"

"I wish you would!" Barbara invited him cordially.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm a married man, and I have four of these people." Schofield indicated the baby, sitting serenely in his arms. "I've got a married son," he admitted, "and a girl in college. The little ones, two girls of fifteen and fourteen, are with their mother. My wife," he added casually, "hasn't lived with me for ten years. She has a position in a library in Berkeley. She was a great woman," he finished thoughtfully, "for dusting and having meals on time! My Lord, what that woman could do with a broom and a bucket of suds!"

Barry laughed joyfully, and Barbara, although not without a secret impulse of sympathy with the unknown Mrs Schofield, laughed, too.

Schofield stayed with them for four days, and they were happy days for everyone. He made no secret of his admiration for Barbara as well as for Barry; he found the old hacienda a place of enchantment, and with his friendly talk and companionable help, the housework seemed nothing, and the hours flew. Even Barbara's clear vision was blurred by his eager, convincing attitude, and it was not until the last day that she appreciated fully that it was really to Schofield that she owed Barry's complete change of attitude toward any regular work in Cottonwood.

To Schofield, Barry du Spain was the great poet of the century, the new Keats. Schofield pointed out to husband and wife that for Barry, the unknown, unheralded Westerner, to have achieved the place he had already made for himself among the younger American poets, was proof of what he claimed.

"Why, my dear girl, look at Dovely and Mattson and myself and lots

of others in San Francisco, and a score like us in every city in the Union—glad enough if the daily papers will print our stuff for nothing! And this boy here, this kid, only has to send it to the most exclusive—the most exacting—of the Eastern magazines to have them jump at it!"

"Yes, I know," Barbara had conceded proudly, with shining eyes. "But the most exclusive, the most exacting of the Eastern magazines don't pay much!" she had submitted, half timidly, half playfully.

"Pay! My God, who's talking about *pay!* If the magazines that pay take your stuff, you can be mighty sure it's rotten!" Schofield had almost shouted.

"You're right, Schofield," Barry, listening to this conversation from the side lines, had put in here, nodding.

"But poets' wives and children must eat, Schofield," Barbara argued, one morning when she and her visitor were with the baby in the kitchen, and Barry had disappeared to do some work, in his own eyrie.

"My dear Barbara, that doesn't sound like you! Let's not talk in the terms of rotary clubs!"

"Ah, but, Schofield, one *must,* when there's a child to consider. Nobody could have greater faith in Barry's genius than I have. I agree with you that he is entirely out of the ordinary—more," said Barbara, kneeling at the oven of the clumsy old range, and gently drawing a rice pudding toward her, to stir its creamy depths carefully, "more, I'd even admit that Barry's the type that never ought to marry," she said, smiling, "although goodness knows that he is absolutely irresponsible, and if any man ever needed to have a woman look out for him, Barry's the man! But the fact remains that he *is* married, and he has a child, and there you are."

"This San Francisco woman—this rich old freak who likes the idea that she is a patron of the arts," Schofield persisted, returning to the argument he never forced, and yet never abandoned, "wants to send Barry to New York. She doesn't usually bother with married men. But she's making an exception of Du Spain. He could meet his own kind of people there, he could get the recognition he needs to spur him on, and—above all!—he could probably place his play. Now, you and I, Barbara, who love him more than any other two persons in the world, we know that he ought to go—that this is the psychological moment when he *must* go."

"She offers him his trip and one hundred a month," Barbara summarized, now busily scraping carrots at the sink. "He'd need every cent of it there, wouldn't he?"

"He needs—freedom!" Schofield stated.

"If he could send me twenty-five," Barbara mused, "I'd make it do." And in her anxious thoughts she added: "Even for hospital and nurse, and some arrangement for Kate while I am ill, I'd make it do. Perhaps Amy would take Kate."

"I doubt if he could manage on seventy-five—that isn't the point any-

way," Schofield reasoned. "We want him to be *free,* you and I, don't we? We want him to have his chance! He mustn't go on there with picayunish worries and cares about his family on his mind. It'll kill him, if he attempts it. He's nervous and excited enough now."

Barbara laughed, shook an obdurate head.

"Next year, maybe."

"Next year this old lady may be dead!"

"Yes, and next year I may be dead, too. No," Barbara decided cheerfully, beginning to fold a basketful of Kate's dry clothing briskly, "no, it isn't possible now, Schofield, delightful as it sounds. He'll have to take care of us this year, and stay at home, and write his poetry, and finish his play, as best he can, here! And some day he'll have another chance, and that time he'll be able to take it!"

"People are apt to have so many chances of this sort in a lifetime," Barry, who had come into the kitchen unobserved, said quietly and bitterly. Barbara, carrying a pile of clean garments to the bedroom bureau drawers, resolutely avoided meeting his eyes.

Schofield left that afternoon, he and Barry starting to walk the twelve miles into town at about one o'clock. Barbara did not expect Barry to return that night, but she was surprised that he made no allusion to the possibility of his remaining in Cottonwood. It was already taken for granted, was it, his occasional absence overnight?

When he came back it was three days later, and in his darkest and most despairing mood. The weather was bitterly cold and wet, and life in the dark, damp old smoky kitchen came nearer to being actually unendurable than Barbara had yet found it. Between the rains, there were frosts; the north sides of walls and clods of earth, barns, and fences were rimmed with icy white beads, the chickens were miserable, and the windmill creaked and splashed and complained all day and all night.

Under all Barbara's desperate effort to keep the domestic atmosphere dignified and serene ran a bleak current of anger, an abiding resentment that the life they had agreed so gaily to share should have brought her so heavy a burden, leaving Barry free. The beautiful child she had borne him, and that other child that the slow, painful months were bringing to her, were surely his responsibility as well as her own?

Yet it was for her to grow daily less and less comfortable, to step daily further and further down into the valley of physical disability and mental distress, while he raged and sulked about the kitchen because he could not go, eager and carefree, to the Bohemian life of another city. She must pay not only her own supreme tax in this matter, but bear his humiliating and galling contempt as well.

For his attitude was growing to be more and more impatiently contemptuous. His few comments upon the situation, in these days, were filled with superbly disdainful allusions to "women," and their stultifying effect upon the lives of men. "Women" weren't happy unless they had the house cluttered up with children; "women" were always thinking

about the neighbors; "women" cared more about money than they did about anything else in the world.

Barbara was beyond mere noisy altercation now. Even while he fulminated one angry phrase after another she was thinking—thinking. They must get away from the hacienda, and if Barry would not support her and her children, then she must turn wage-earner again. No use fighting, and multiplying angry words. No use reproaching him; that only made matters worse. Somehow, as women had lived through the unendurable before this, she must manage to live through the next six months. After that it would be easier, and she might begin to construct and look ahead.

One noon, a few days before Christmas, she put the situation fairly before Barry.

"Dearest, we can't keep this up—you must see that. We simply cannot stay here. No matter how simply and humbly, we'll have to go into Cottonwood and make a start. That's the only way to work our way up."

"My taking orders from Harry Poett, I suppose," Barry suggested, lighting a cigarette, a sneer lifting the corner of his mouth.

His tone antagonized her; but she felt too tired and discouraged for a scene. Barbara forced her tone to good-nature and patience as she answered:

"It wouldn't be taking orders; you talk as if you'd be his valet! It would be a start."

"Yes," Barry muttered, making a long arm to reach for a magazine, "it might be. But excuse me from that kind of a start!"

Barbara automatically gave Kate a napkin ring and the china cover of the sugar bowl with which to play, and began to scrape and pile dishes.

"A man ought to support his family, Barry. Doesn't it occur to you that I ought to have some say in the matter, as well as yourself, Barry?"

She discarded both openings, as they phrased themselves on her tongue, and was, with some difficulty, silent.

"They'd love it," Barry admitted, "they'd love the idea that I was selling shoe clerks and telephone operators homes in the new development. Meat for them!"

"But, Barry, you'd have your mornings for your poetry. Harry distinctly said so. It'd be really only Saturday afternoon and Sunday—and just to report at the office, every afternoon, in case they needed you."

"Yes, exactly," Barry assented drily. "Kindly excuse me."

Barbara, nettled and puzzled, was silent. Presently she said:

"Well, something must be done, dear, and why not that as well as anything else?"

"If you don't mind, I'd rather not discuss it. Harry Poett never has meant anything in my life, and I object to his being drawn into it."

"But we *must* discuss it, Barry!"

There was a silence.

"I don't know," Barry said then, in a peculiar, cold tone. "I don't know that we *must* discuss it. I could discuss my going to New York,

having my chance, if it came down to that! I notice you dismiss *that* plan very easily, there's no particular discussion of that. When it comes to *your* comfort, your way, your plans, then we must discuss it! When it comes to mine, it's a very different thing. 'Oh, no, Schofield,' you say then, 'unfortunately, it's out of the question! He must stay here, and live in a swilly little pen of a cottage down near the dressmaker's—he must take orders from Harry Poett.' "

His voice went on and on. Barbara dried saucers, dried hot glasses, dried knives and slipped them, jingling, into their drawer. Kate awakened with a shout from a nap, and was her most fascinating self.

Presently Barry exhausted his arguments, grabbed his cap, slid into his overcoat, and was gone. The steady rain spattered and fell, dripped from the dim patio roofs, blew over the flat farming country in gray sheets, like smoke. The fire sputtered, light gusts of ashes puffed over the room, settled again. It was three o'clock.

Four o'clock. Five o'clock. Dark was at half-past four now, in the shortest days of the year, and by seven Barbara felt that she was sitting up all night. She went to bed, the hot-water bottle comfortingly at her feet, a lamp at her elbow, Kate spread face downward within reach, and a good book waiting.

Outside, the rain had stopped, there had been a cold hard sunset, and the frost was snapping in the branches of fruit trees, and the sea fell with noise of scythes on the rocks. Silence, the bound silence of the black winter night, and then the slithering crash of the salt, cold water, or the ominous snap of twigs in the orchard. Now and then a log answered from the fireplace, with a sleepy soft sound of splitting and a gallant, brief upspurting of flame. And now and then a mouse's teeth could be heard in the pantry, busy against wood, gnawing, gnawing, gnawing, and still again.

Nine o'clock. Barbara put out her light.

Barry did not come the next day, nor the next. The third day was the eve of Barbara's birthday, and of Christmas Eve. It was a soft, foggy day, with a warm wind bringing in great banners of weaving, undulating mist from the ocean. A sort of hush lay over the ranch, the barns were hidden from sight, behind layers of milky veiling, and the cow, suddenly shouldering her way into Barbara's neighborhood from the paddock, appeared menacingly close and large, like a specter cow of heroic size, out of the strange, enveloping whiteness.

There was a tipsy old table on the tiles outside the kitchen door, and here was an offering, waiting. A loaf of Mrs Bettancourt's sour, delicious bread, rolled in a tea towel, and a letter that was lying face down.

Warm-hearted little Maria, making a neighborly gift, as if she did not have ten hungry mouths to devour her bread! Barbara put her milk bucket on the table, put Kate down on the kitchen floor, and turned her letter right side up. And then with a tightening of fingers about her heart,

and the taste of salt water in her mouth, she saw that it bore a San Francisco postmark, and that it was from Barry.

No need to read it. She stood staring at it dully. She knew what it must say. He was going to accept the offer of this rich old patron of the arts, this Mrs Wicherley or Winderby or Wilkinson, or whatever her name was. He was going to New York.

My darling: [*ran the letter, penned in Schofield's quarters in the Bohemia of San Francisco*]

I've got to go—for both our sakes. I can't stand it, the dirt and cold and darkness, the damned boiled onions and apple puddings. When I can give you servants and pearls and fountains of crystal—things that fit your red hair and white skin, I'll come back—I'll come back, Barberry Bush, and we'll be happy fools again. Napoleon and I are going East together, to seek our fortunes, for you and the winkle. For God's sake, don't cry. . . .

There was more in the same strain. But she put the letter down, chilled and nauseated. She could read no more. The falseness of it, the conscious dramatizing of her agony made her feel ill.

She stood perfectly still, in the center of the kitchen, staring into space with narrowed, unseeing eyes, her lower lip bitten, her nostrils flickering, her breast rising and falling rapidly.

He had left her. Her man had left her. She was the sort of woman who could be deserted by her husband, who could be left to all the agonies and humiliations of readjustment, with the eyes of the world watching her, and the skeptics of the world laughing, and the women of the world whispering behind their hands.

"Oh, Barry!" she said aloud, in anguish, "why did you do it—why did you do it! Together, we might have gotten out, somehow. Now, you've spoiled it all—you've spoiled it all!"

The shock made her feel weak and dazed. Automatically she took off the child's wrappings, and automatically put her into her high chair. And then suddenly she seized a piece of paper, and scribbled a telegram. Tomas must take it into town on his milk route tomorrow—at any cost to her own pride and dignity, Barry must not be permitted to throw aside his own name and honor in this way.

Barbara's whole worldly fortune consisted of eighty-five cents and fifty-five of these must be spent on the telegram. But, no matter, she had no choice.

She stood panting, deliberating, looking at the baby. If she left Kate here, of course Kate would roar like a mad bull for all the twenty-five minutes it would take Barbara to run across the half-mile space that separated the hacienda from the Bettancourts' cabin.

But to carry the baby all that way, in the rapidly deepening dark, would be to double the difficulty and danger of the trip, even if Barbara

did not lose her way and lose time in the fog. She took a last survey of the kitchen, gave Kate a cooky, remarked, "Mom-mom coming *right* back," in an encouraging tone, and started out at a wild run.

Over the fence, over last year's dry, flattened yellow grass, and past the row of spiked and fluted thistles, standing high and brown, and delicately beaded and made fairylike in the fog, through the Bettancourts' pasture gate, where lumbering, terrified great shadows that might have been elephants, but that really were only the everyday cattle, galloped awkwardly to left and right . . .

There was enough light left to keep her general direction, and behind her the steady crash and suck of the unseen sea was a guide.

And only halfway, what luck to come upon Tomas himself, lazily rounding up the cows that would be safer in the barn this bewildering milky-white night, what a relief to cram the telegram and money into his Indian-brown hand, and be speeding back to the baby again, only ten minutes absent in all!

It was when the sobbing Kate was safe in her arms, and she herself panting and sighing great recuperative sighs in the rocker, that she could first begin to think out the new situation and try to grasp exactly what it meant to her.

"Return at once, I must see you," she had said in her telegram, "will expect you Thursday night."

This was Wednesday night, he would receive the telegram tomorrow morning, incidentally the morning of Christmas Eve and Barbara's birthday, and he would take the one o'clock train for Cottonwood. Reaching it at half-past two, he must be at the ranch by six, even if he walked. If he got a lift, as he usually did, he might be home a full hour earlier.

And she must take a stiff tone with him now. She must forbid him—yes, forbid him exactly as a mother would forbid a little boy—to think of leaving her until after June, and until she and her children were established in Cottonwood.

Who but a selfish, blind, unthinking boy would leave a woman in her position, anyway! But it was in that way that she must think of him, just as a boy—a boy who was oddly, also, a genius. Plenty of the world's immortals had set him his example.

Strange scheme, that yet gave that boy the power to take unto himself a wife, to become the father of helpless babies who needed a man—a protector. Well, strange or not, that *was* the scheme, and from now on she must see clearer—she must have strength for two, she must no longer permit herself to be a burden on him, nor permit him to dictate the terms of her life to her.

In ten years, in five, perhaps, if she was fortunate, she would be smiling at the memory of these bitter, disillusioned days of their early marriage. She must keep that ten-year, that five-year goal, always before her eyes.

She resolutely put away from her any thought of resentment or anger.

These were bad for soul and body, now. Women got through times like this—they didn't die, and later the world merely said casually: "She has two children, I think. She has a position in the Post Office—or the Library—or she sells real estate—and he's somewhere in the East."

That was all. Nothing sensational about it. One heard it every day. The women who sold gloves and waited on tables were perfectly willing to talk about it.

"Sure, I'm married—I've got a girl of eleven. My husband went off with another woman, I had to go back to my father—I almost died over it," they said. Or, "I call myself 'Miss,' but of course I'm really 'Mrs'. I got the wrong man; he treated me something terrible. He left me before my baby came."

One didn't think, placidly trying on fabric gloves, or ordering salad and tea, of the tragedies behind the simple phrases, the tears, the agonies, and agitations. Other women's problems always seemed so simple and so remote.

Well, God willing, hers would seem so, too, some day. She would keep her own counsel, preserve, for their children's sake, the outer shell of dignity that Barry broke so carelessly, and build, instead of the happy, carefree, gipsying life of which she had dreamed beside him, the soberer, sadder, wiser life of the woman who must stand alone.

Twenty-five years old tomorrow. Barbara crept in beside Kate, in the warm darkness at eight o'clock, and put her hand across the sleeping baby, and cried as if her heart would break.

The next day the world was still mystical and strange with creamy fog, the sea invisible, and the ranch only a little circle of flat dry grass and hazy blotches of fence and barns. Mist pulsed softly in the patio, now and then the horn of a bewildered and anxious steamer droned regularly from the ocean, moved upon its way, and was gone.

Barbara felt as if she were living in a cloud. There was a stillness, an unearthly effect of blanketing and dulling about the day; all her horizons were lost, and no voice but her own and Kate's broke the long, slow hours.

Her housework absorbed her: ashes, dishes, buckets, and pails. She made the kitchen spotless, made Barry's favorite chocolate custard for supper. She heated the great coppers, full of cold well water, and managed a comfortable bath, brushed her bright hair and bound it trimly about her head, hung a crisp fresh apron on a nail.

After luncheon she and Kate tried a walk. But the fog was too confusing. Twenty feet from the fence or road one was completely enveloped, lost in pearly spaces, stumbling on clods that might lead north or south, or east or west, alike. And to keep to the road meant merely to move in the same bewildering circle of rough wheeltracks, stiffened with frost, until one tired of the chamber of mist and turned about to go back.

All day long, Barbara followed in her thoughts the progress of her telegram to Barry. Now he was receiving it, now he and Schofield were

impatiently discussing it. Half-past twelve. He would be turning toward the Townsend Street Station. Two o'clock. Now he was well upon his way.

Their walk brought them back to the cow yard, where Sooky was standing disconsolately, her jaw resting on a low fence rail, a low, breathy moan pouring through her wet, freckled, shining pink satin muzzle. Barbara gave her crusted flank a slap, and led the way to the hay barn, where there was a dimly lighted empty space between the two high mows. She took her milk pail from a wooden peg, and seated herself with her forehead against Sooky's silky flank.

"It's only four o'clock, Sook," said Barbara, milking. "But you don't mind being a little early? The days seem ten years long."

Kate sat flat upon the adobe floor that was carpeted an inch deep in chaff and loose hay, and argued in a delicious baby gabble about the fog. She had seen fog before, but not so often but that she greeted today's unusual mistiness with a hopeful, "Moke?"

Barbara had explained that it was not smoke. As she sat milking tonight she let her dreamy fancy play with the idea of an enormous fire, in the west, and banners and columns of actual smoke blowing over the land. The sun had set the world on fire, and there would presently be tongues of pink flame lapping through this sea fog, and everything and everyone would be enveloped in it.

"I hope I'm not going crazy!" she thought, carrying milk and baby through the silent, white-fuming paddocks and yards into the patio. Fog pressed against the hacienda, the trees were only phantoms through the waving walls of tulle. The fountain was a dull blur; beyond the fountain the roofs and galleries had vanished, they were swallowed into the fog. "We're fogbound, Kate," Barbara told the baby. And she stopped at the patio door, listening.

From far out toward the west a faint, desolate sound was coming, repeated over and over again. The short pathetic plaint of a steamer whistle, as the vessel beat her way up the dangerous coast. She did not know where she was going, poor thing. Barbara pictured the anxious man in the crow's-nest, the straining eyes of the lookouts trying to pierce the fog, fancying all sorts of dangers hidden behind that impalpable, rising and falling wall.

She waited where she was until the sound had slowly moved from south to north and had vanished into the gathering shadows that were beginning to reinforce and thicken the mist. Then she picked Kate from the tiles, picked up the milk bucket, and turned toward the house again.

CHAPTER XVIII

A SOUND behind her made her whirl about and brought her heart into her mouth. A voice?—Now?—and here——

Out of the fog a man's figure had suddenly materialized; a thin, shabby, unshaven man, terrifyingly close and unfamiliar.

"Good evening!" he said.

Barbara regained her breath, swallowed with a dry throat, managed to find her voice.

"Good—good evening. You startled me. Oh, good evening, Slinder," she said, recognizing in the caller the ex-convict who had been occupying the place when she and Barry had come down to it, more than two years ago, and to whom Barry had elected to talk and listen almost all his wedding night.

"Good evening!" he repeated, with an oddly sly glance. "You didn't reckernize me, seems?"

"Not—not just at first." She hated his twisted smile. "But now I do!"

"Where's the mate, eh?" the man asked.

"The—the mate? My husband, you mean. He isn't—he isn't here *just* now," Barbara answered, her tone suddenly becoming definite and confident, as she grasped the significance of the question, "but I expect him any minute."

"Got a baby, huh?" the man said.

Barbara hated to see Kate's delicious fat brown fingers in his oily, strangely weak-looking ones.

"Yes, but she's a big girl now, she's more than a year old," she answered uneasily. Horrible to have this undesirable guest suddenly materializing; what did he want? What was he doing down here on the lonely seacoast on this bleak winter night?

"What I was going to ask him was about the chances of my getting a night's rest on the hay," Slinder said, with his sidewise glance.

Was that merely whining confidence in his tone, or something like an easy and unhurried menace? She could not decide, her heart was thumping heavily, and her brain seemed strangely flurried. Who was near? Who would help her? She could not think.

The wreathing mists, mingled with twilight now, circled and sank and rose again over the barnyards and the fields; the sound of the sea, crashing, crashing, crashing, could be heard in the unearthly winter stillness.

"I think your chances are very good!" Barbara told her unwelcome caller, with an air of commonplace hospitality. "I'll call you, if you like, the minute Mr du Spain gets home."

"Du Spain! That was the name all right," Slinder commented. But he did not move toward the barn; he remained resting lazily against the deep adobe curve of the narrow patio doorway shutting her off from the yard, smiling, and looking boldly at her with his insolent eyes.

The darkness was gathering fast now, great folds of gray were lapping against the lighter gray; Barbara, looking at him, could hardly see the man's weak and vicious face.

"I don't suppose he leaves much money down here in charge of his dear wife?" Slinder asked deliberately.

Barbara's heart gave a thick, slow throb, as if it turned over within her.

"No, he doesn't leave any money at all!" she answered quickly and sharply. "There's no objection to your sleeping in the barn if you want to, and I'll give you some supper. But we've no money here!"

"That's what *you* say, my dear," Slinder said silkily, leaning toward her. As he lurched, losing his foothold a little, for the first time she caught the odor of liquor on his breath.

Obeying a blind, terrified impulse, Barbara, the milkpail still in her right hand, the baby caught under her left arm, turned like a flash, crossed the pavement of tiles, entered the dim, smoky kitchen, and slammed the heavy door.

Kate she tumbled unceremoniously on the bed, and springing back to the door she dropped the heavy iron bar that reinforced its solid thickness. There she stood for a moment, panting, listening.

Not a sound came from without. The dark kitchen was absolutely silent, except for Kate's interrogative "Mom-mom-mom-mom?" from the bed.

Barbara's eyes, mad with blind instinctive terror, searched the room. The south pantry had no window, it was merely a black box. The north pantry door, like the patio door, had a heavy iron bar, on the kitchen side. The garden window had been barred like a prison window with iron rods, against the liquor-seeking revelers of old carnival times, perhaps, when even the hacienda kitchen was not safe from the roving keepers of the fiesta.

There remained only the door into Barry's bedroom, and the danger of the bedroom itself. Beyond lay a long hallway, punctuated with doors. It was the door into the bedroom that she must guard, for the bedroom was accessible from a dozen entrances, and half the old doors did not hold.

All this rushed through her mind as quickly as light. Not daring to delay even long enough to find lamp and matches, she shoved against the bedroom door the heavy old trunk she and Barry used for a seat.

The door opened toward the kitchen; it would be a strong man who could force it, with the weight of the chest against it. And Slinder was not strong.

But he had been drinking, and he might be angry. Barbara went close to the door that opened on the patio. There was a slit, intended for just such reconnoitering, cut in its upper panel; a slit some two inches wide, covered on the inside with a movable flap.

She did not open the flap, but she moved it enough to give her eye a match-wide crack through which fearfully to inspect the patio.

For awhile she could see nothing but fog, dusky walls of whitish-gray that blotted out the fountain and the galleries, that dimmed the very pavement. Then suddenly she saw Slinder, lying flat, face down, his body partly extended through the patio gate.

While she watched he raised himself to a sitting position, and began to talk to himself. He muttered indignantly, and getting to his feet, he came straight toward the kitchen door.

Barbara's heart turned to water. She closed the flap, and went to the bed, and took the baby into her arms.

"Oh, my God, save us—oh, God, send Barry home!" she whispered.

There was a knocking on the panels, followed by a silence. The kitchen was dark, except for sleepy red firelight. Barbara tried to see the clock's face, but there was not enough light. It must be about four—Barry might easily come home at any minute now, especially if he had chanced to get a lift out from town.

"Oh, my God, save us! Oh, God—God——"

"Open up, Missis!" Slinder shouted.

He hammered again, frantically, and Barbara thought that she would go mad. But she held herself rigidly silent. It was only for Kate—it was only for Kate she cared. He should not touch, he should not frighten the baby.

Quietly, tremblingly, she set the baby down and went to the mantel. She groped for matches, lighted the lamp.

The shadows leaped and swelled and sank again, and the reassuring light filled the room. The garden window was barred, the bedroom door barred, at least as far as the chest could block it, the pantries were shut off, and at any minute Barry's voice might sound blessedly through the fog. It was all she could do.

The hammering and muttering continued at the patio door, but he made no attack. If he took a beam and crashed it in, of course the wood might give. On the other hand, it was old wood, seasoned and tough, and swollen tight into its frame.

"Well, anyway, while he's banging there he can't be in the pantry, too," Barbara muttered. She opened the south pantry door, although her heart stood still with fear as it swung open upon the blackness within, and brought bread and meat and potatoes out to the kitchen, in a single breathless rush, before she barred it again.

"Gimme twenty dollars and I'll go!" Slinder shouted. "You got it—you know you got it! You're rich—you can't tell me!"

He hammered on the door again. Barbara stood still in the middle of the kitchen, watching with dilated eyes the spot whence the noise proceeded.

The Bettancourts were half a mile away, far out of hearing on this gloomy, fog-shrouded afternoon. But why didn't Barry come?

Oh, to hear his voice calling, "Barbara, what is it?" To hear his big boots falling on the patio tiles! To have him catch this drunken bully by the collar——

She went to the door and shouted: "We have no money, I tell you! If you'll go out of that patio I'll put some food out for you! But I have no money."

"Gimme twenty dollars!" came back the stupid, heavy demand. "You leave me come in, and you betcher I'll find it. You won't keep it from me long!"

The subsiding of her first wild fright had given her an interval of feverish confidence and activity. But now panic seized her again.

All very well for a few moments, perhaps, this barricade of the kitchen doors and windows, this fortress in her own living room. But suppose he had more of the foul stuff he had been drinking there, and suppose he grew furious? He would not be the first man to butcher a helpless woman and a baby on a lonely farm, and make his escape days before the discovery of his crime set the law on his trail.

And Barbara felt her mouth grow dry again, and her heart beat slowly and thickly, and again she whispered, in the lonely kitchen, "Oh, my God, what shall I do?"

And then like a pulse beating madly in her heart the blind, suffocated prayer again: "Oh, my God, oh, my God, save us!"

He was crashing on the shutters with something—a rake handle, perhaps, or a stout plank. The shutters rattled agitatedly but the iron bars held. Barbara could hear him raging as he battled with the old window.

"You give me twenty dollars and I won't hurt you!" she heard him shout, again and again. And after awhile he added, "You think you can keep me out, don't you?"

Afterward followed a long silence. Barbara wondered if he was going to climb on the roof and block the chimneys. Could he do it? Perhaps they were too wide.

She gave Kate her supper, looking fearfully about as she measured the careful spoonfuls, stabbed to the heart by the baby's serenity. Unconscious little Kate, with the first frightful danger of her life just beyond the door! At seven o'clock Kate was soundly, splendidly asleep, and Barbara, sitting beside her, watching and waiting, held in her hands a cup of smoking coffee and hot milk. She could not eat, but the hot drink put courage into her, and after it, she settled herself for her vigil with a stern, pale anxious face, and tired, alert eyes. Barry must have stopped for dinner in town. But he would come!

Again the rattling on the window shutter, and again she watched it apprehensively, her bitten lip murmuring wild prayers. Suddenly Barbara's eyes lighted strangely, and getting to her feet she went to the stove, and with a fearful look kept always upon the shutter, she mixed a pitcher of coffee and sweetened it, and heaped fried potatoes on the plate that held the meat.

The bottle of ipecac that was always ready for Kate's croup was on a shelf. Barbara poured it into the coffee, and tasted the mess with a knitted brow. The label said "poison," and was marked plainly with an antidote, but she was desperate now.

When the shutter behind her was shaking unmistakably, and its rattle was accompanied by Slinder's less and less intelligible threats, Barbara

quickly opened the patio door, and put the plate of food and the steaming pitcher of doctored coffee on the little table outside, in the patio. The cold night air rushed at her, the fog still hung over the world like a pall, but there was no other menace.

Yet Barbara was trembling from head to foot as she slammed the bar home again, and she went to kneel for a minute beside Kate's bed, and hold the warm little hand in her own, as if to reassure herself that matters were at least no worse than they had been.

Then she went back to the shutter, and putting her face close against it, she shouted: "Mr Slinder! I put your dinner beside the door."

Perhaps it would sober him, perhaps it would pacify him. Perhaps, of course, it would kill him.

He came round to the patio door, and with her ear close to the tiny slit she could hear him wolfing his food, gulping his coffee. Suppose she had poisoned him? Then she would be a murderer, and tried for manslaughter, perhaps.

The minutes went by in deathlike silence, and there was no other attack. The clock ticked, and ashes fell in the fire, but outside silence reigned.

Was the pantry door shaking? Barbara, brought suddenly to attention, looked at it fearfully. She whirled about, sickened suddenly with a horrible feeling that the man had at last succeeded in broaching the garden window, behind her, and that his sinister face was smiling triumphantly at her, from its frame.

But firelight and lamplight only showed the peaceful old adobe walls of the kitchen, the barred shutters, the closed doors. Her books in a row on the old ramp that protruded like a wide shelf all about the room; had she ever been so free and peaceful in body or spirit as to enjoy the imaginary adventures of books? Were there women in Cottonwood tonight, bored, comfortable, protected, tucking themselves luxuriously under satin covers, reaching idle white hands for books?

Oh, if morning ever came and brought with it—by some miracle!—Tomas or Barry, if this hideous, half-crazed visitor were put safely out of the way, with what utter gratitude and thankfulness she and the baby would escape from the ranch, would make their way back to Cottonwood, there to beg, or to borrow, or to work their way somehow to a simple life of their own, a tiny inconspicuous niche where they might eat and sleep and toil humbly, in blessed nearness to voices and human faces for all the rest of their lives!

Perhaps Barry was not coming. The endless black hours of the winter night were ahead. She must face them somehow; she must not go mad, she must live until morning.

Eight o'clock. Deathly silence outside. Had she killed Slinder? She could imagine Barry being everything that was kind and concerned and sympathetic, at her trial. His beautiful face agitated and pale, his voice hoarse with agony and pity, what a figure of sympathy and despair he

would be. He would put his head down and sob out: "Gentlemen, I am far more to blame than she is!"

But she, Kate's mother, and expecting another baby in early June, would be the murderer. Barry would be quite safe. "For God's sake, Barberry Bush, don't cry!" he would entreat her. "It kills me to see you cry!"

Her thoughts drifted to and fro dreamily; perhaps she was dying of fright? There seemed to be a dwindling and sinking within as if the forces of her being were ebbing out through the wound in her heart.

To be back in the little kitchen at home with Amy, on a soft summer morning, how wonderful that would seem now! Amy making coffee jelly, one of her few culinary accomplishments, and Barbara doing one of a hundred happy, unimportant things, grating cheese, polishing spoons, or writing notes, and both girls chattering busily all the time.

"Amy, don't you think it would be stunning to get some of that regular nigger print at Berning's, blue and black and yellow, and pipe it with turkey-red, and make straight, plain dresses with wide collars? I think they'd be awfully smart."

"They'd be stunning! And I'll tell you, Babs. You could get a small hat frame and cover it with the same stuff. . . ."

Hollyhocks outside the kitchen window, and down the street; through the warm, scented morning stillness, under the big trees, the sound of a fish-horn.

"Babs, there's Tony! Let's see if he has crabs."

She came to herself with a jolt. That wasn't the familiar old Friday morning fish-horn, that horn was the voice of a ship, off the coast. She was down at the hacienda, twelve miles from town, on the foggiest winter night the world had ever known. She was alone with her baby in the barricaded kitchen, and at large somewhere on the place was a demented, intoxicated convict who would kill both if he could.

The trembling began again, her teeth chattered, and she swallowed with a dry throat. Half-past eight o'clock. The night would never end.

"Oh, God, save us. Oh, Barry, come back to us! I can't stand it—all this terrible night long!"

Suddenly there was a sickening crash behind her; Barbara was on her feet, her fingers bunched against her lips, her starting eyes fixed upon the garden window.

Under a violent blow from outside, the stout old solid shutter had split, and through the splintered gap Barbara could catch a glimpse of a face—Slinder's face——

The iron rods, buried deep in the old masonry, only a few inches apart, were no nearer to yielding now than they had been for more than a hundred years, but Barbara did not think of that. She saw the wood spatter and crack, and heard it give, and she heard her own frantic screams, ringing through the kitchen.

Again and again she screamed, quite without effort, quite without con-

sciousness. The room echoed with the hideous sound, and Kate awakened and burst into terrified uproar.

It was when she saw the first evidences of fright upon the baby's exquisite little face that Barbara came to her senses. Instantly she was still, and her voice, as she dropped on her knees beside the bed, was exactly the voice Kate knew, tender, crooning, reassuring.

"My darling—no, you mustn't be frightened—did your mother scare her little baby? Here's Mother, Kate. I'm taking care of you, my precious!"

And in the next second there was a furious, sharp rapping on the patio door, directly opposite the window where the blows had been crashing a few moments ago, and at last—at last—at last, the voice of someone—someone there to save her!

"Barbara—open it! For God's sake, what's the matter?"

Her knees would hardly hold her as she ran, she had no voice, her fingers fumbled helplessly at the heavy latch.

"Barry—look out for him—behind you—oh, my God, I thank Thee! Oh, wait—wait—I'm doing it as fast as I can—I'm trying to open it——"

And then the door opening, and a blessed great figure coming in out of dark, writhing veils of fog, and herself crying, sobbing, tight in a man's arms, trying to speak, trying to drag his big arms closer—closer about her. . . .

"Oh, my God, I'm so grateful—you got here in time! Oh, God—*God*—I thought he would kill us both, me and the baby! He's been here—hours—hours—threatening me—he's drunk——"

"Where's Barry, Barbara?" Link Mackenzie said loudly, harshly, wild with bewilderment and amazement. Without loosing his firm hold of her, he flung a hand backward to shut the door, got her to a chair, and knelt down beside her, working her suddenly cold hands in his own, anxious, puzzled eyes on her face. "For God's sake, what *is* it?" he muttered.

Barbara leaned her forehead against him, gulping, spent her brow wet.

"Oh, Link," she whispered, "I'm so glad you came!"

"Don't be frightened, dear," he said tenderly, "I'm here. I'll take care of you."

Her eyes were shut, she rested against him like an exhausted bird.

"I know you are—I know you will!" she panted, utter peace in the white face that shone with sweat. And for a moment she could say no more.

"What frightened you, dear?"

For answer she brought a heavy, uncomprehending look to his own.

"Give me the baby, will you, Link?" she whispered.

He brought her the child, and she bent her head weakly over Kate's rich, silky curls, breathing hard, like a runner.

"Link—what brought you?"

"Why," he smiled pitifully, humoring her, "our birthday, Barbara."

"So it is." She pushed her hair off her forehead, looked about the room, brought her eyes to his face. "Did you see him?"

"See who, dear? There's no one here."

"Oh, yes, there is! Look at that shutter there—he broke that. He might have killed us!"

"Tramp?" Link asked quickly, kindling horror in his glance.

"A convict—Slinder's his name. He was down here a couple of years ago—stole from Barry. He—" she began to tremble—"he threatened me, Link. He's been raging all about—he's drunk, too."

"Where's Barry, Barbara?" The man asked it quietly, but there was a strange note in his voice.

"Link, promise me something—promise me that if I faint, if I'm ill, you won't leave Kate and me here tonight! *Promise me——"*

He saw that she was already ill, her hands icy, her cheeks blazing.

"I promise you, dear—on my oath. When I go back to Cottonwood, I'll take you both, and you'll never come down here again! I swear it, Barbara. Never mind the man—we'll get him. Never mind anything, except that I'm here—Joe Miller's waiting for me in the car, right outside here, and we're going to take you and the baby back. We're going to take care of you, and see that everything's comfortably settled, and you're going to have a long rest!"

"It sounds—" she faltered, crying, "like heaven!"

"Can you get hold of Barry, and we can get out?" Link asked. "Let me talk to him. This is no place for you—too lonely, and too much work to do. A scare like this——"

"But he's in San Francisco, Link. Barry's not here!"

She said it simply, almost apologetically, watching his face.

"In San Francisco!"

Barbara nodded.

"You were here alone?"

"Oh, for several days now. And today—today got on my nerves!" Barbara confessed, shaking.

"My *God!"* Link said forcibly. And his kind, rough, homely face darkened ominously. "What's he doing in the city?"

"He—" Fool that she was, she was thickening and trembling into tears again—"he's left me, Link."

A silence. Then Link said, in a stupefied voice:

"*Left* you!"

Again the girl nodded, smiling through brimming eyes. Hot tears splashed on the baby's curls.

"Why, he *couldn't* have," Link began, in the tone of one trying to understand. "Left you? What did he think——"

He stopped short, bit his lip.

"Did he say so, in so many words?" he asked gently.

"He wrote it. He had had the blues," Barbara explained with simplicity, "and he had a chance to go to New York——"

"To *New York!*"

"Yes. A rich old woman who does things for men without family ties. And Barry was worried—depressed. You see, there's going to be another baby in June," Barbara added, a little awkwardly, "and he hates all the fuss——"

She stopped, distressed eyes upon Link's face.

"I'd had that letter," she resumed, "and I wired him. It made me feel —horrible, of course. And then to have this man turn up and want money—and Barry not come back—when I *needed* him so——"

And she began to cry, childishly wiping her eyes with the back of her thin, work-scarred hand.

"Well, the best thing to do is to get you out of this," Link said abruptly, irrelevantly. "Tell me what you need—what the baby needs ——"

The practical aspect of the move revived her. She opened bureau drawers, brought out Kate's cap and coat; it wrung the man's heart to see her stop, now and then, in her slow, half-stupid moving about, and wipe her eyes, with a sort of patient bewilderment.

"Now that I've started crying, I don't seem able to stop!" she said.

Link called in Joe Miller; the lights of the car wheeled like a fan through the fuming mists of the patio. The two men talked in low tones, inspected the shattered shutter, tramped with a heartening noise and nervelessness to and fro.

"Guess he's got away, Barbara," said Joe Miller.

She only smiled wearily. She moved as if very tired.

"Go by-by?" said Kate.

"Go by-by, darling."

"Better make a report on him tonight and have him rounded up—he's got a record. A man who would scare a girl that way would do anything," Link said, in a low tone.

"Oh, he would have killed us!" Barbara said, overhearing.

Link did not choose to enlarge upon it.

"I'll bet you would have put up a pretty good fight!"

"Oh, I would have—I even thought of the ax. For Kate's sake——"

"You look like you were going to come down sick, Barbara," Joe Miller said concernedly. A square-built, kindly man of fifty, whose friendship for her dated back to her actual babyhood, he glanced vaguely at the kettle. "Oughtn't you have a cup of tea or something?"

"Nothing, nothing," she said gratefully. But her face was ashen white and she tottered on her feet. "I want to get to houses—voices—streets," she whispered.

"Yes, and we'll start!" Link said, giving her an anxious glance. "Wrap that blanket round the baby, Joe. He knows all about handling them, Barbara—he'll not drop her. We don't have to lock up here, I'll send someone down tomorrow. Lean on me, dear."

"Ah, you're so wonderful, Link. You're so kind—so wonderful to

anyone in trouble," she said drowsily and heavily, "so terribly kind it's so good to be taken care of."

Blanketed, secure, she was on the front seat. The fog was cle now, the night air was sharp and fresh. In the dark, the sea made a ing sound on the rocks.

"Want your baby, Barbara?" the cheerful, friendly voice came the back seat.

"Safe with you, Mr Miller. You've had three to practice on. I'm—" her voice suddenly flagged, weakened—"I'm so tired," she

"Just stick it out for another fifteen minutes," Link urged, wit oblique glance.

"Oh, yes. I'm all right. I'm trying," said Barbara's sweet, weary as they started upon their way, "I'm trying not to think what might happened if you hadn't come, Link."

He turned into the highway; they could see the lights of Cottony lying like a band of sparks caught in gray gauze, miles away. Ligh houses—blessed companionship.

"Had to come for our birthday, Barbara!" Link said lightly, a tionately.

"You never forget it," she said unsteadily.

"And I had Kate's puppy—he's in the back seat there, and a proposition Joe and I meant to make to Barry—about the place. Barbara," Link reproached her, "you oughtn't to stay down there out somebody."

She was Barry's wife. She would not say that she had protested today's terrible solitude had been no part of her plan.

"I know——" she admitted weakly. And then the fingers of he hand grasped his arm, and she felt her whole body flex and relax ag him. "I'm so sorry—the hospital——" she muttered. "I'm so sorry-

He freed his big right arm, put it tightly about her, spared an i from the irregularities of the road to look at her sharply.

"Keep it up just a few minutes, dear—you're all right!"

The drowning blue eyes, picked up by a street light, shone in with their old brave radiance. Then they darkened, and he hear inextinguishable, rueful laughter in her shadow of a voice as she

"I'm dying, Link. What a—what a way to behave on—on one's day!"

CHAPTER XIX

Consciousness was a red spark of agony, in a whirl of hot dark In the infinite blackness there was peace.

Blackness—velvety and obscure. To get back into it—deeper int not to be the fiery particle so hideously separated. The spark ex somehow, but the blackness was nothingness.

Something existed, twisted and tortured and bewildered—something struggling not to exist. Something wet and writhing and nauseated and moaning; through the blackness shot with showers and showers of sparks there was a frightened screaming going on. "No—no—no!"

And then darkness, heavenly darkness again, and the pressure—whatever it was, subsiding, subsiding. . . .

Time was not, space was not. But after awhile a troubled sense of place and being began to pain, an added pain to the fearful and familiar pain in someone's head. "Yesterday, yesterday," said a whispering voice, screaming a jagged tear through the pain. "Yesterday—yesterday—yesterday," a senseless babble began, "yesterday—yesterday, yesterday."

"She heard you——" There was a sense of movement, waves of soft movement, like the sea.

She was somebody, listening. Voices were horribly loud and jarring, and to open her eyes would mean that something split—hideously—into fragments. But she could listen.

"I'd try it." Why should people shout so, especially when their shouting was inside of one—a part of one—a hurtful part of one, not to be torn loose. . . .

Showers and showers and showers of red sparks, wheeling over the pit of the dark. It was agony to be only a spark. . . .

She was that frightful thing, the largest spark, forcing her way, shrieking and screaming, through the others.

"Back——" She wanted to go back, not to be a spark any more.

Something tinkling on glass; a delicate little tinkle. She would wash the dishes as soon as her head was better, as soon as she could force open her blazing eyes.

"Babs—my dearest——"

This meant nothing at all. It was merely vaguely distressing.

"Dearest, don't you know Amy? Babs——"

She must open her eyes. The jagged lightning tore through them and through her, and then came the familiar slipping—the delicious plunge back into the dark.

Long spaces, centuries, æons, intervened. She understood everything now; life was all one. That was why things hurt so.

"Life is all one," she heard a voice say thickly and loudly. But this caused such a raw dragging pain in somebody's throat that it stopped abruptly.

Then there were more movements; very guarded and soft, and some talk about somebody coming around.

"She was trying to speak then, Doctor."

Who was? Somebody named Barbara. They were all murmuring and brushing about in a light place, talking about Barbara.

"Did she know you?"

"No, but she was conscious there for a second, Miss Ryan thinks."

"She'll know you when she wakes up again."

Whoever she was, she hadn't known Amy. She might know Kate. Perhaps she would like to see Kate, perhaps she would know Kate.

Ward. Amy. Kate. "Babs, dearest—*dearest*—this is Amy. Won't you look at Kate?"

Whoever Babs was she evidently didn't look at Kate—whoever Kate was. For whoever Amy was, Amy began to cry. Silly to cry. It only made Barry mad.

"Barry—you can't go away now——" Whispering, this was. Her head ached. Why was she whispering this so busily, when she was so tired and weak that even whispering hurt? "Barry—you can't go away now."

Poor Barbara Atherton; it was boiling hot in the kitchen—she had to hurry, hurry, hurry—get the wood in—feed the chickens—pin out that wash—or the man would be kept waiting! Hot—hot—hot—nothing to breathe anywhere, and one was going to be frightfully sick. . . .

"Sick——"She was crying weakly with pity for whoever was so sick. "And he *did* hit my head——"

"Her head aches, Doctor. She keeps trying to move it."

"What did she say then?" These were not whispers; mere breaths of clear voices.

"I couldn't get it. Something about her head."

One's eyes were half open, it appeared, for there was that brass scroll that held the electric light, and a clean angle of curtained window. Daytime, for the light was out, and the window bright. No, night again, for there was a paper shade pinned about the light, and nurses whispering. No, day. Someone was saying, "Good-morning, Doctor."

Fingers were quietly holding hers. For a long time she could not think what that warm, steady, soft pressure was. Then she remembered, fingers. Suck—slap—suck—slap. That must be a window shade sucking and slapping gently, like a sail, on an opened window sash.

"No headache." She said it distinctly, faintly, without opening her eyes.

An instant, fragrant stir near her. A voice, rich with tenderness:

"No headache, my darling? Is it a relief?"

"It's—*heavenly!*"

Then, after a long silence:

"Amy?"

"Yes, my dearest!" But why was Amy crying so hard? Her voice was thick and shaken with tears.

Then Ward Duffy's voice. Where could they all be, anyway, that Ward Duffy should be here?

"Amy—you mustn't, dear. You ought to be laughing, now." And then clearly, after a space of silence. "Bad for your darling baby, Amy!"

Somehow one knew one must say that. But why? Did it matter? Yet now that her head had stopped aching, she liked to speak, in this heavy, droning voice.

She heard the flurry among them, felt the nurse's clever fingers at her wrist. Her eyes opened wide, and a shock of frightful pain went through her temples, and was gone.

Amy—two Amys steadying to one; one little blue velvet hat on Amy's head.

"New hat, Amy?"

"New——? What did she say? Oh, new hat? Yes, dearest." How gentle their voices were. As if words—sounds—could break her!

And then suddenly memory and understanding. And those who watched her saw the intelligence come back into the violet-ringed blue eyes, and with intelligence, fear. Barry—Slinder—the fog—the ranch kitchen, and the little figure in the draggled doublegown——

"Amy! Kate——?"

"Lie down. Kate's fine. She's at our house with Ward's mother."

Barbara sank back on the pillows, panting, her eyes shut again. When she opened them Amy was still there, watching her with a tender, loving look.

"Is there another baby, Amy?"

Amy slipped to her knees beside the bed, put her lips against Barbara's languid hand. And Barbara felt her sister's cheek wet.

She did not open her eyes. But those who watched her saw tears slip down from the shadow of the dark, lowered lashes on her ivory white cheeks.

"No—no little brother in June?" she whispered, tasting salt.

"If you knew how proud we are to have gotten *you* out of it so beautifully, Mrs du Spain, you'd feel fortunate!"

This was the nurse. Barbara opened her eyes, and Amy, in tears herself, gently dried them with a handkerchief.

For a long time the pleasant white room was very still.

"You had a close call, darling," said Amy.

"I suppose so." Barbara lay thinking, her hand in her sister's.

"And you have Kate, the most delicious baby I ever saw, everyone is wild about her!" Amy added, more cheerfully.

"The darling!" Barbara smiled weakly. "Could I see her?" she asked, her eyes filling again, but more from the effort of speech than from any conscious emotion.

"Any time now!" the nurse assured her warmly. The invalid smiled weakly again: it was something to look forward to, that first glimpse of Kate. "Was Barry here?"

"No, he was on his way East, you know. We sent him messages, but, of course, when you're away," Amy began to explain carefully, "you *don't* realize what people are going through at home."

Barbara's eyes moved to her sister's thoughtfully; she slightly bit her lip, wrinkling her brow. But she made no comment.

"If you will drink this and then try to sleep, you might have a caller

this afternoon," the nurse interposed skillfully, and Barbara obediently emptied the glass.

She was smiling as she went off to sleep, with the window shade still making a pleasant, yacht-like sound—suck-slap-suck-slap—and Gertrude Ryan, pretty in white and blue, still gently chafing her hand.

"I suppose I'll be well again, some day, Amy?" This was later.

"Suppose, Barberry? Why, my darling, the whole town's talking about the rapidity with which you're getting well. Peritonitis, or something awfully near it."

"I remember Link arriving at the ranch, Christmas Eve——"

"Don't think about that, Babs."

"Oh, I can think about anything, now. Lying here, just loafing and dreaming, with no chickens and cow and lamps and dishes and laundry to worry about, and just enchanting trays and flowers——"

Amy was in the rocker with Kate, sound asleep, in her arms. Sweet January sunshine was filtering through the spotless curtains and, with the warmth from the radiators, giving an illusion of summer to the peaceful, orderly room.

"But I can't remember getting sick," Barbara mused.

"It was that very night, the night Link and Joe Miller went down, it was while you were driving home in the car with Link that you had a sort of chill."

"I don't remember it at all!"

"Well, anyway, it was probably Mr Miller who saved your life. Link was going to take you to his house—that would have been exciting, and confusing, naturally, telling his father all about it, sitting up half the night. But Mr Miller—and it was a funny thing for him to do, too, for he's such a quiet old fellow!—Mr Miller told Link that he didn't like the chill at all. Much better to get you right into good care. It was only about ten o'clock, you know, Christmas Eve. So Link took you to the hospital, and then went for Dr Bonner and told him you'd had a shock and a chill."

Amy shook her head, shuddering.

"By that time, I imagine, you were all off," she resumed, turning a little pale. "Link says you called him 'Barry,' and seemed to think that you were going to New York. Just feverish, maybe. But the minute they got you in here they put you into bed, and Dr Bonner came, and Ward."

"Ward? Was he here?"

"That was a part of the whole mix-up, Babs. Ward and I had come up that very day to surprise his family and spend Christmas with them. We were going down to see you on Christmas Day. Ward's to be here, now, with Dr Bonner. I wrote you all that.

"They got you up to the surgery that night," Amy added, after a silence, in which she had smiled down at Kate, and Barbara, lying weak, sweet, and utterly at ease among her pillows, had smiled at both. "And then, on the twenty-ninth, something went wrong and they had to

operate again. And that—" Amy finished, with a great breath, and a desperate glance heavenward—"that was the time we thought it was all up!"

"I haven't the faintest recollection of it," Barbara said, frowning faintly, narrowing her eyes, trying to remember it.

Nothing but vague shadows returned. She seemed able to recall infinite fatigue, and a thick, smothered sensation of being hurt, suffocated, held down, and hot pains. And the bewildering wheeling of day and night, day and night, with the eternal fretted sense that they were not easing her agony. And then sweeping, draining, sinking weakness upon weakness. . . .

"Don't think about it, Barberry Bush!" Amy pleaded, watching her uneasily.

"Not for awhile," she agreed, shutting her eyes. And after awhile Amy was gone—and day was gone—and night was gone—and the queer circle recommenced again.

Presently she began to feel anchors beneath her, to talk with her nurses, to smile appreciatively at her trays. One day Link Mackenzie came in, with a box of white violets from the Mackenzie garden—no other garden in town had quite such violets. They were snowy, rough balls, like popcorn, the scent of them drifted through the orderly white room. Barbara's thin, languid hand lay happily among the wet, jointed stems.

"They feel like the spring, Link."

"Well, spring's due in a few weeks now."

"I can't believe it. Any mustard yet?"

"Mustard all over everywhere. And acacia in bud down our drive, and iris commencing—all out the Mountain Charlie road the place is blue with iris."

"I always love this time." But he saw the shadow back of the beautiful eyes that grew so dreamy. She was remembering days when she and Barry hunted down the iris and the acacia, and came home from river walks weary and dirty, laden with delicate fragrant blooms. And although Link could not exactly place her thoughts, he knew where they must be.

"Link dear," she said, her voice clear and tender in the silence, "some day I'm going to—to thank you. But it makes me cry, now."

She smiled at him, and he smiled back, a little consciously. The fingers of her nearest hand were in his, he rubbed his thumb gently to and fro, across them.

"That'd be silly."

"I know. I cry so easily, now!" And she made her word good by blinking blue eyes that suddenly brimmed.

"That's just weakness," Link said encouragingly.

"I know. But I seem to stay weak so long! That was Christmas Eve—

our birthday. And now it's almost February—it'll be February tomorrow." She lay still, two tears on her cheeks.

"Link, would he have killed us? Slinder, I mean."

"No, I don't think so. You're so strong, Barbara, that, even if he hadn't been drunk, you'd have been a match for him."

"No woman," she said thoughtfully, "ever thinks she's a match for a man."

"Yes, but you would have done it for Kate."

"Yes," she agreed. "I might have done it for Kate."

"Shut your eyes, Barbara. It would make a good deal of character for me in this hospital if you'd just go to sleep."

She did shut them, but not before a delicious crinkle of laughter met his own; there was a half smile on her white face as she lay there, peaceful and still, her left hand touching the violets, her right still safe in Link's fingers.

The white room was very still; the spring sunshine had moved away from the window, but Link could see tree-tops outside, already enameled in scarlet tips, and stirring gently in the spring wind.

He looked at Barbara, lying back, with eyes closed, the umber shadow of her rich, thick lashes falling on her thin cheeks. The top of her blue pajamas buttoned with a Chinese cord and frog, her beautiful throat was bare, and the loosened rings of her coppery hair lay like little drakes'-tails of bright wire against her white forehead.

Link looked at her for a long time; he imagined the mouth smiling, speaking, the eyes looking at him. He watched her breast rise and fall evenly, with the quiet beating of her heart.

Once she opened her eyes quite widely in faint alarm, and looked anxiously about her. But immediately she saw Link, patiently sitting beside her, and with a child's confident look she dropped her shadowed, blue-veined lids again.

"What a good sport she is!" Link thought affectionately. She had had a hard fight and she was winning. He liked to think that he had been important to the victory.

Barbara had come back to life with one fixed conviction, and it was one he naturally shared, and one that all Cottonwood shared. Barbara Atherton had had an awfully close call, down there on that God-forsaken ranch of the Du Spains, and if it had not been for Link Mackenzie's providential arrival at the critical moment, she might not be alive today.

The entire town was praising Link. Link had brought her up to the hospital, Link had summoned the doctors, Link had magnificently made himself responsible for everything. Nothing half-hearted about his way of doing things!

"Heavens, what a friend!" said nurses and doctors, smiling and shaking admiring heads. "Well, I guess this girl owes you her life, Link," said the doctor.

Amy carried on the chorus.

"Barbara, you'd die at Link Mackenzie! He's simply determined that you're going to get well, and that you're not to worry."

"He's perfectly wonderful. But that's Link; he does everything like that," Barbara said languidly, smiling.

Her first outings were in Link's roadster. Carefully bundled, she sat beside him on the low front seat and cried for joy because the bridal wreath and mock orange were beginning to bloom. Her first dreamy inquiries into ways and means were answered, once and for all, by Link.

"Barbara, I'll tell you what I've done. I've paid everything, on the nail, and kept a most careful account——"

"You have kept an account?" she interrupted, raising blue eyes and tightening the fingers that lay in his.

"Every cent."

"You're a wonderful brother to have, Link." She quite innocently thought of him so; she could not praise him enough, talk about him enough. "I've always known that Link was the kindest person alive," she told Marianne, upon the occasion of Marianne's first call, "but you have to be in trouble to know exactly how important kindness is!"

"Don't you?" said Marianne. "And Link has a sort of complex, now, upon leaving no stone unturned in the matter of your getting well," she added. "He wants to talk to everybody about transfusions and anæsthetics."

"I suppose so!" Barbara said, with an indulgent smile. "I don't know how Barry and I can ever repay him!" she went on simply. Marianne shot her a quick suspicious glance. Was Barbara fencing?

But there was only a convalescent child's wearied, contented smile upon Barbara's white face, and Marianne had to concede that she was not yet strong enough to see life as the world of Cottonwood saw it.

Barry! Cottonwood had small faith in anything he was going to do. But Marianne couldn't tell Barbara that.

No one spoke to her about Barry. But one day, after she left the hospital, she faced the subject courageously with Amy.

It was a wet, warm day, with soft rains spattering on the new lilac leaves and making coffee-colored rivers along the curbs. Amy lived in the home of the senior Duffy's, now; she and Ward had the whole upper floor to themselves. Barbara and Kate were with them.

Ward's mother had an orphaned grandson of four to raise, and that meant that Kate had a companion. The elder Mrs Duffy was a gentle, simple woman, always busy with front parlor curtains, or lemon meringue pies in a very dream of an old-fashioned kitchen. So Amy and Barbara could murmur on upstairs uninterruptedly for hours, and it was in those hours of rest and content that Barbara quite tangibly felt her heart begin to heal.

Amy, busy with baby clothes, would take the rocker. Barbara would lie stretched upon the old walnut bed, sometimes with Kate moored in

the circle of her arm. Through the dormer windows the high foliage of the pear and maple trees moved in the sweet spring breezes, and the rain drummed softly on the roof.

"Somebody wired Barry that first night I was taken ill, I suppose?" Barbara asked one day.

"No, we couldn't," Amy answered in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice. "Nobody knew exactly how to reach him, you see. That was Christmas Eve, and we couldn't get anything out of you, you were too sick. And by the day after Christmas you were so well that everything seemed to be going too nicely to scare him. But it was two days before New Year's that the fever came back."

"I don't remember that time in there at all!"

"No, I know you don't. You simply lay there, like a log—oh, good heavens, what days for us all!" Amy said, with a shudder. "We wired New York then, to an address we found on a letter, down at the ranch, but we found out later Barry never got that wire. That day, and the next, and New Year's Day, they simply didn't give us any hope at all—it was the most frightful thing I ever lived through! And then a note came for you from Barry, giving a New York address, and we could write. But by that time the worst was over."

There was a silence, during which all the things Amy dared not say hung almost audibly in the air. Barbara lay musing, one hand under her cheek.

"He never should have left you," Amy said, against her own will, after awhile.

Barbara raised conscious eyes to her sister's, and nodded slightly.

"No, of course not!" she conceded quickly, uneasily. "Although, of course, he couldn't know that Slinder and all the rest of it would happen," she added.

"He knew you weren't well," Amy had to say, in spite of herself.

"Yes, I know. But having a baby isn't really being *sick*," Barbara argued, a faintly anxious expression in her eyes as she watched Amy's face.

Amy was afraid of exciting her, and only offered a soothing:

"Barry never was like anyone else, anyway!"

"No," Barbara agreed eagerly, a little color creeping into the cheeks that had been pale so long. "He wouldn't see it—see doing a thing like that, the way any other man would!"

"Barbara," Amy asked, after a pause, "were you happy?"

"Happy?" the other woman echoed, genuinely surprised.

"Yes—I mean with Barry, I mean in your marriage."

"Well, yes, I guess so." Barbara hesitated, laughed a little puzzled laugh. "I think so," she answered. "We were frightfully poor, of course," she reminded her sister, "and life—down there at the ranch—wasn't easy, in lots of ways. No bath, and no electric light or telephone or gas—nothing of that sort!"

"I know," Amy said simply. And Barbara suspected from her tone that she had not only considered all the details, and their bearing upon the present situation, but had discussed them with the immediate family circle.

"Barry and I didn't quarrel, after the first few months," Barbara resumed, "but he—he's excitable and unreasonable sometimes. And having another baby coming along so promptly made it—" she hesitated —"made it quite a problem!" she finished mildly.

Amy began to stitch the hem in a soft little flannel skirt. She did not speak.

"I think the real disappointment—if that isn't too strong a word—in my marriage, to me," Barbara presently resumed, "was the discovery that marriage isn't fair to the woman. The burden of the whole thing falls on her, she's the one that has to make the money do, keep the home comfortable, brace the man through all his troubles and worries, and bear the children. I'll never—" her voice dropped into silence, and she lay still for a minute, looking dreamily out of the dormer window, to the plumy tree-tops moving in the wind—"I'll never feel quite the same about life," she said.

"All married life isn't like that!" Amy told her loyally. Barbara moved her eyes to her sister's face and smiled.

"I suppose not," she agreed. And she did not speak again.

They gave her Barry's letters; one sent to Amy in the beginning of her illness, two brief notes for Barbara herself. His play had a chance, there were important decisions to be awaited in New York, but of course he would come if her health demanded it and if they thought it best. However, unless it was urgent, this would be a bad time to break away.

Her languid hand dropped them; they interested her no longer. The spring was creeping warm and green and fragrant over Cottonwood. She was better every day, stronger every day. A strange confidence and serenity possessed her; her father found her much older, much more silent and gentle and wise than he had ever supposed the wild and enthusiastic and impulsive Barberry Bush could grow to be in twice her years.

When Amy and Ward took possession of their own home, Barbara and Kate and Professor Atherton would continue to board at Mrs Duffy's. There was no particular thrill in it, there was no mad excitement and surprise, but it all worked out with sensible ease. Nobody criticized or asked awkward questions. Barbara Atherton's husband was in New York, and she and her father and little girl were at the Duffys', that was all.

The school was delighted to welcome her back; she had always been a good teacher, and she was a better teacher now. Looking at her own life from a detached point of view, Barbara had to admit that there was nothing sensational about it all.

Occasionally, she had bitter storms of tears to fight, when the tragedy of the whole disillusioning experience seemed to tear at her heart, when the memories of Barry, and their young love, their jokes and labors on the old ranch together, their talks by the fire, and the icy nights when they consulted anxiously over the baby's basket, were almost more than she could bear. But these times grew less frequent, as the weeks wore on, and as she came to realize how much her content and health meant to those about her, and how little they cared for her secret shame and suffering as long as she could bear them well.

She might feel strangely alone, strangely independent and apathetic, as she rearranged her whole scheme, yet there was an odd satisfaction in knowing herself equal to the demand.

"I've promised to finish out this term at school, Link," she said to him one afternoon, when they were walking slowly to his house, for some croquet. "But if Barry's play really does go on this spring, and does well at all, probably Kate and I'll go East as soon as the hot weather is over."

"And should you be glad to go?" the man asked, after a pause.

"Well—under certain circumstances, yes. But, of course, I have infinitely less responsibility here," Barbara answered.

"You love him, don't you?" Link asked simply, with a disarming smile.

She could smile back, unoffended.

"I'm his wife."

"Yes, I know." He ended on a discontented note, and Barbara laughed. "It seems to me you're awfully brave about all this, Barberry Bush," Link added a little awkwardly, after a pause.

"Only because I'm taking it day by day," she answered, with a faint little frown as she tried to put her thought into words. "I try not to worry about what may happen or may not!"

The man glanced at her sidewise, as she moved along beside him, through the wide, tree-shaded streets of Cottonwood's aristocratic quarter. The old-fashioned homes on either side were lost in immense plantations of pepper and locust and elm trees, the natural California oaks spread magnificent branching arms over the lawns and rose gardens. Everywhere was stately beauty and early summer peace; sunshine, mottled with tree shadows, fell in blots and bars on the striped awnings, lawn-sprinklers sent a cool swishing sound through the still, fragrant air.

Barbara wore a much-washed white cotton frock, and the small shabby blue hat that had formed a part of her wedding costume. But her coppery hair was full of golden glints, her flawless skin was touched on the high cheek bones with apricot bloom, and her blue eyes shone with a new gravity, with a soberer happiness that accentuated their beauty. Whatever her costume, there was a distinction, a certain reserve and grace about her now that she had not had as a girl, and the man who walked

beside her was conscious of it to an extent that made him feel strangely young and humble when he was with her.

"Your father put the mortgage on his house," he reproached her.

"He had to, Link. We couldn't go on owing you all that money forever."

"Forever! There was no hurry."

She laughed indifferently.

"As if you hadn't done enough! The mortgage doesn't worry Dad, you know, and it makes me feel a million times easier. I didn't want the whole town to think that Link Mackenzie had paid all my bills."

Link sniffed contemptuously.

"As if it mattered what the town thinks!"

"Well," Barbara said temperately, after a moment's thought, "I think it matters what the town thinks. And as for what I owe you, in other ways than dollars and cents," she added, with a little emotion, "there'll never be any computing—or any repaying *that*."

She could say these things quite simply, smile at him with all her ardent, grateful soul in her eyes. From the troubled stormy years of her wifehood and motherhood, through the fiery bath of desperate illness, she had emerged with the purified, innocent vision of a child.

"My opinion is," said old Mrs Duffy to her son's wife, "my honest opinion, Amy, is that Barb'ry hasn't ever been in love in her life."

"Well," Amy conceded, "perhaps you're right. She was a funny sort of girl—like a boy, with all the boys. I don't believe she ever really waked up, to—well, to love, until after she was married."

"I don't know's she did then," said the older woman shrewdly. "Barry du Spain was a great one for po'try, and runnin' around on picnics and playin' games, but that ain't love, Amy—don't touch them pickles, child, they're li'ble to make ye sick! No, she's just a little girl, for all she's so sensible. And the Lord stand by," Mrs Duffy added, forming rolls from spongy dough, with expert fingers, "the Lord stand by if ever Mr Link Mackenzie plays alarm clock!"

Amy's eyes narrowed, brightened, she caught a quick breath.

"She could get a divorce, I suppose?" she said, in a whisper.

"That wouldn't do her much good, the way Link's folk's hold," Mrs Duffy said. "Old Major Tom wouldn't stand for that!"

"I don't believe Barbara would, either," Amy added.

"No, don't know's she would," Mrs Duffy agreed.

"But what a mess!" Amy burst out suddenly, "what a waste, not to have had her like Link in the beginning! Think of the fun, Barbara as Mrs Mackenzie. She'd be so wonderful—she'd do it so well! And now the greatest misfortune that could happen would be to have her fall in love with him!"

"Well, they ain't the only folks in town that have made a mess of it," Mrs Duffy said significantly.

"No, I suppose not." But Amy sighed heavily. "What she'll *do*," she

went on resentfully, "is follow Barry to New York, and live through freezing winters and broiling summers on a fourth floor somewhere, having a baby every year, and letting him treat her like a doormat!"

"She ain't the first, Amy. If she thinks he needs her, she'll stick!" the older woman predicted. And Amy, staring gloomily into space, by silence gave consent.

CHAPTER XX

THE WEEKS began to slide by, and Barbara, pursuing her serene way, grew rosier and stronger. Sometimes Link joined them all at the Duffys' comfortable supper table, sharing canned corn and tea biscuit with the rest, carrying Kate upstairs for Barbara, when Kate collapsed into slumber in her chair. Sometimes he joined Barbara and Amy and Ward for a Sunday drive, or got tickets for them all for a concert or movie. A thousand little intimacies sprang up between him and Barry du Spain's wife.

He came to know Barbara's various frocks, would praise the dotted swiss, recommend that she carry her blue coat. He would telephone to ask if Kate's sniffles had amounted to anything, to ask Barbara to tell her father there was an article about spiders in the new *Scientific World*. Barbara knew how he liked his tea, now, and Link knew that she hated gum and cigar smoke and saxophones, and loved little bags of jelly beans, and crossword puzzles, and—above all—croquet.

It was the foolish old game that brought the first real color back to her cheeks, and the first ring of her own peculiar excitement and enthusiasm to her voice. She loved to play, and she played vigorously and well. Almost every Saturday afternoon, during the balmy days of April and May, when the fruit blossoms came out in a flood, and the locusts wore their tassels, and the bridal wreath foamed like a snowy fountain at the foot of the lawn, there was croquet at the Mackenzies.

When Link's father came out, to stand planted squarely upon his sturdy old legs, watching the game, smiling at her dash and mettle, it was with a child's pleasure and pride that she smiled back at him. She was not a woman now, and a woman with a strange history and position in the eyes of the town. She was again an eager, hot-faced, breathless little girl, pushing her coppery hair off a damp forehead, running over the green grass, fanning herself with her hat while she watched the others play.

And when Link himself looked at her, she saw nothing unusual in his glance, even though all the others did. She did not know that her slim straight figure in its shabby cottons, with its blazing head, was the center of the whole scene. Sometimes they all saw him hesitate and flush, happily and confusedly and self-consciously, when he spoke to her, and sometimes they heard, what she never heard, his tone linger as if he would have liked to add "you darling!" to the commonest phrase, to

"Your turn, Barbara," or "You'd better make a wicket," when it was said to her. A thousand times her utter unconsciousness, her serious childish dependence on him, checked him from some revelation unanalyzed even in his own heart, and held back the words he had never dreamed he wanted to say.

Often, in the spring mornings, when she was teaching her dozen of small restless children, he would stop at the school for a few minutes of casual talk with Barbara. Often, when she had gone back to Mrs Duffy's in the early afternoon, for her late luncheon in the kitchen, and her rediscovery of Kate, changing every day, and every day a delicious surprise, Link would come in, perhaps only for five minutes, but usually with a plan, a message from Lucy, a letter from Margaret, now in Europe, a book, or some trifle for Kate.

If Barbara had any errand, there was Link's car for her use. If she must somehow get a chair or a trunk or an armful of books or a newly ironed frock from the senior Duffy homestead to that of the doctor son, Link was eager to be of use.

He was very quiet, entirely inexacting; his squarely-built figure, in the comfortable loose tweeds he wore, his fine, keen, homely face, with its sunburned hard cheeks and gray eyes, came to be a sort of comforting, unfailing prop and background to her life. Sometimes he saw her at a disadvantage, worried about money, tired, despondent; and being a woman, she knew it. But the next time they met, when she was rested, groomed, confident again, she would know that he was no less friendly, that perhaps indeed he liked her better for the memory of the tear-stained cheeks and disordered hair, when she had had to turn to him for advice.

Now and then he said to her cheerfully and casually:

"Any news from Barry?"

And she would have to answer, with a little stain of brighter color in her face, and with a courageous, level look from unsmiling eyes:

"Not a word."

Presently they two could talk of Barry, a privilege Barbara enjoyed with no other person in the world. Link was lenient, interested without being violently prejudiced, and generous.

"Queer boy, Barry," he would comment mildly.

"That's exactly what he is," Barbara would agree. "Amy and my father can't see it. But he's a queer boy."

"Well, you know him, Barbara. What do you suppose'll be the next move?"

She would wrinkle her clear forehead, bring to meet his look the candid blue of her beautiful eyes.

"Link, I haven't the remotest idea! Sometimes I think that if his play succeeds he'll want us to come on. Sometimes I think that he has completely forgotten us. My only job is to go straight ahead and make what life I can for myself and the baby.

"And I surely have already made the most wonderful friend any woman ever had," Barbara might add, in her own thoughts, gratefully and affectionately.

Link never made her self-conscious, never said to her a word that the whole world might not hear. But every one of the lazy spring days entrenched him a little more deeply in her life.

He came to know every phase of her existence; he knew which of the kindergarten children she found tractable and lovable, which ones were difficult and unfriendly. For his benefit she quoted, or even impersonated their mothers. He knew her problems: the question of Kate's nap, the shabbiness of the coat that had to be lined as soon as the weather was warm enough to permit her to spare it. It was Link's pleased proud glance that made her know that she had made no mistake in her spring hat, the small white hat that was pulled down so far and so firmly on her blazing hair.

Closer, closer, closer they came. There was no flirtation about it, now, no quarrels or misunderstandings or doubts such as lovers know. But there was a continual strengthening and tightening of the bond of affection and confidence between a strong and determined man and a lovely and lonely woman.

They did not always talk when they were together. Sometimes Barbara, on the front seat of his car beside him, with Kate in her lap, would be silent for happy half hours together. Sometimes, when others were talking, she would merely raise her fringed blue eyes, and let her amused or surprised or significant look meet Link's for a second, before she lowered her lids again without comment.

She could say to him reproachfully: "You were wrong there, Link. You acted too hastily about that committee meeting," without angering him. Or Link might comment, "You were all off, last night, Barbara. Didn't look like yourself and didn't act like yourself. What was the matter?"

It made no difference. The only thing that mattered now was that they should not miss a few moments' chat, miss communication on one score or another every twenty-four hours.

And day after day after day Link appeared at the school, at the house, at Amy's, quiet, square-built, friendly, concerned.

"Listen, Barbara, Tilly says she thinks macaroni with some sort of goo all over it would be fine for Sunday supper, after the croquet."

"You mean in place of the salad?"

"Well, she says so."

"Well, let's try it. Oh, and, Link——"

He would turn back.

"Link, I'm going to shop with Amy this afternoon. She's in the throes of curtaining."

"What time'll you be through?"

"About five, I guess. She's going to have Kate at her house, and we're

going to have some sort of pick-up supper there. She hasn't any cook yet, you know, only Anna, for the baby."

"Well, I'll telephone Ward. Maybe I'll get an invitation."

He was quite simple, quite frank about it. He would get his invitation, and come naturally and unembarrassedly into Amy's new kitchen, never making any fuss about Babs, as Amy commented to Ward, but never willing to be anywhere but in Babs's immediate neighborhood.

"It's my impression," said Amy, "that he'll get her so crazy about him that after awhile she'll go through a divorce to marry him."

And Ward, pursing his lips, considering perhaps for the first time the advantage of having a sister-in-law who was the richest woman in town, conceded that perhaps she was right.

"I don't think they suspect it. I know she doesn't; she's just generally pleased to have things going well and Link so friendly," Amy added shrewdly. "The point of the whole thing will come when Barbara suddenly realizes that she's absolutely bound to Barry and that she's madly in love with Link."

"You think she is in love with him, Amy?"

"Well, all ready to be. Good gracious, Ward, how could any woman help it!"

The gossiping old women of Cottonwood, rocking on porches, when the sweet, dragging afternoons of spring came, commented merely that it was a pity Barbara Atherton had made her market quite so promptly.

"She ain't the kind that chucks the father of her baby out to marry a rich feller," they predicted.

"Looks more to me like he did the chucking out," perhaps a fairer critic would suggest.

"'Twouldn't matter. Old Tom Mackenzie ain't the kind that stands for any monkeying with married women! Look how he carried on when Link was so took up with Marianne Scott, awhile back," said the side-porch club interestedly.

But all they saw was that Link Mackenzie and Barbara Atherton were continually in each other's company, if not often together alone, and that Barbara grew stronger and handsomer every minute, coming and going serenely between her school classes and the Duffy's old-fashioned mansard house, spending Saturday and Sunday afternoons on the Mackenzie lawn, quite innocently, openly, simply, and speaking to Link, and glancing at Link, with all the quiet, proud affection and confidence of a little sister.

Among them all, none watched the situation with a keener, tenser interest than did Marianne Scott. To the world's eye, Marianne was merely that dashing and handsome young woman cousin of Inez Wilson to whom Link Mackenzie had been so unmistakably attentive last year. She had mildly shocked the community by the announcements of her status as a married and as a divorced woman in indecently rapid sequence, she was discussed between funerals, births, marriages, scandals,

murders, wills, and other town events with a certain inexhaustible relish.

"She had her mouth all set for Link," said the gossips, "but he fooled her. If Tom Mackenzie didn't have a finger in the pie, I miss my guess!

Perhaps Marianne had missed her guess, too. But if she had, she gave no sign of confusion or vexation. She was as beautiful, as brilliant as before, as Fox and Harry were willing to testify.

Marianne drifted about her aunt's house all morning long, just as before, trailing her beautiful dressing gowns behind her. She dressed at about noon, pecked at her lunch, walked to the country club to play golf or bridge, gossiped over teacups between five and six, and usually could count upon a male escort, or a male call, for the evenings.

But Link Mackenzie didn't come any more to the French windows of the dining room in the spring mornings to gossip with her. And when she went dawdling her pretty way to the Mackenzies' lawn in the afternoons, she was merely one—and no longer the important one—of the group. She told Inez, somewhat disgustedly, that they had all apparently grown childish. Croquet! She was sick of croquet.

There was great shouting, animated disputes.

"Well, let Barbara play with Fox, then, and Harry take Lucy!"

"Aw, *no*—Barbara and Fox are much too strong!"

"Why, you just said——"

"Yes, but gosh——"

"Well, now, listen here—listen here——"

"Link says he'll score. Why not let——"

"Oh, but let's play it this way, and then the other combination can challenge the winners!"

"We'll be playing ring-around-a-rosy next week, I suppose," Marianne said once patiently. But they only laughed at her.

Link was always glad to have her play, but she played poorly and did not care for what she regarded as a "nursery governess sort of game." Link always asked her to dance with him at entertainments, just as Fox and Joe and Harry did. Marianne was quite as certainly included as Barbara in everything the group planned. It wasn't that.

It was that everything seemed changed, since Barbara's illness; Link especially, and Barbara most of all. They had been youngsters, only a year or two ago, awkward and simple, awed by the elegance and sophistication of the city visitor.

Now, with Marianne just the same, still assuming her dashing little costumes, still reddening her lips and combing her dark mane into a black satin cap, now they had somehow left her behind. Barbara, newly grave and thin and wise, was a woman, with a little girl to raise. Link had become quite inaccessible, behind a mask of easy pleasantness and friendliness. Marianne's little overtures, pressures of the hand and artful raising of the eyes, made him tremble and grow clumsy and husky of voice no longer. He did not see them at all.

No, he was intent upon those crazy wickets and pins, and appeared to

live only for the excitement of picnic baskets and foolish muddy childish walks that began nowhere and ended nowhere and involved climbing a lot of fences and hills.

And yet he was so incomparably eligible! A little simple, perhaps, but Marianne was the sort of woman who liked a man simple. And his wife, when he should take a wife, would certainly have the cream of whatever Cottonwood could offer. Mrs T. Lincoln Mackenzie, Junior. Marianne had often visualized the card in her dreams, and she liked the look of it.

Suddenly, she became tremendously confidential and sympathetic and intimate with Link, apparently dropping any personal interests she had to discuss his own nearer problems with him. She gleaned details of his business, and surprised him with intelligent comment upon real estate deals and the hardware market. She spoke with concern of Lucy, Lucy's husband and children, of old Tom, traveling in Europe, and young Margaret who was his companion.

And presently, with infinite tact and caution, she could speak of Barbara.

"Hasn't she been quite extraordinary about making the best of a bad bargain, Link?" she began one day.

"Whom do you mean?" He was carefully winding trout flies. His tone was not encouraging.

"Barbara, of course."

"Oh, yes—of course. Yes. She's wonderful."

"She seems so much more a—well, a person, even in her misfortunes," Marianne ventured, "than she did a few years ago."

"She was only a kid, really, when she married."

"Wasn't she twenty-two?"

"Well, yes. But I mean in the way she thought and acted."

They were on the lawn, waiting for the crowd to gather on a summery May afternoon. The sunshine streamed down placidly upon the green stretch of the turf, peonies and rose bushes made bright blots of color against the great plantations of firs and oaks, maples and peppers, at the end of the enormous garden. Behind them, the gracious plain lines of the brick house rose squarely; pleasant green light and shadow fell through the encompassing tree branches against the white walls and the wide-opened windows.

"I admire her tremendously. She's made her bargain, and she'll stick to it," Marianne said enthusiastically, trying to get him started.

But he merely shrugged.

"She'd die for the people she loves," he offered.

Marianne felt oddly discomfited.

"Do you think she loves *him?*" she asked sharply.

"Barry? Well," Link answered drily and disapprovingly, "she's his wife. Isn't it—the usual thing?"

"Oh, come now, Link, he's treated her like a dog!" Marianne protested impatiently.

Link disengaged a thread of wiry catgut with gentle big fingers. He did not look up.

"Perhaps she doesn't think so," he said coldly, displeased.

"Well, she must think so, if she has any sense at all," Marianne answered briskly, feeling that she was carrying the heavier end of the conversation in the face of a strong east wind.

The man said nothing. Marianne, looking at him with quick, birdlike flashes of irritation, puzzlement, and displeasure, wondered if he really didn't know that he was getting a frightful "crush" on Barbara Atherton? Everyone else knew it. Was one to believe that when he and Barbara were together they talked only of Kate's new kiddy-car and the difficulty of making the middle wicket?

She sighed imperceptibly and changed her course.

"Link, do you like this outfit?" She indicated her costume.

"It's perfectly wonderful. Barbara said it looked like the cover of a May magazine," he answered cordially, laughing.

"What's funny?"

"You. The swimming suits, and caps, and parasols and capes you get into, and the riding togs," Link said, grinning.

"I don't care. I adore hunting pink," Marianne, who was irreproachably clad for the sort of hunt so dear to the British Christmas pictorials, said sulkily.

"Well, you look grand in it, anyway," Link conceded indifferently. And then suddenly his face changed, and his gray eyes lightened with an odd, flickering light, and he got to his feet, spilling bait can and rod and reel to the grass.

A tall woman had come through the gate in the hedge, in a group of other women, and of children.

She wore a much-washed white shirt today, and an old striped skirt; there was a soft little white hat pulled down over her eyes. She was smiling her new, quiet smile, blinking through a sparkling film of bright, coppery hair, and she had the rompered Kate under her arm, dangling limply, like a marionette.

Coming toward them with the others, she did not speak directly to Link; she sat down on the grass beside Marianne's chair, and if her eyes flickered to his, it was but for a second. She took a flat-mouthed little bottle from her sleeveless sweater pocket and groped in the thick grass until she found three white pebbles. The three pebbles, clinking, went into the bottle, and Barbara put it down before the expectant Kate.

Kate shivered from head to foot with sheer electric ecstasy. She poured the pebbles out, and gathered them up in a little damp soft hand with a shriek of excitement. Her mother now brought her full attention to the company for the first time.

"Barbara, I love your shirt!" Marianne said. "Who made it?"

"Who made it! It's one of Barry's old ones," Barbara answered, laughing.

"Barbara, you'll play? Will you take on Lucy? It's a question of ladies against gents."

"Well, it depends on what gents, doesn't it, Lucy? Why don't you have a bush leaguer's game? Fox, you play."

She found a large wire nail in the grass and gave it seriously to Kate.

"How's Inez—is she coming over, Marianne?"

"Pretty well. Yes, she and Miss Wickam will probably wander down when it's a little cooler."

"How's Amy's baby, Barbara?"

"Normal, this morning. She telephoned me before breakfast. Ward says he's all right again. Does everyone know that Rita is going to announce it Monday?"

"*No!* After all the fuss. . . ."

And then Link, from the stake. "Barbara, will you score? Score until someone else comes. anyway. Blue dead on black."

"Blue dead on black." She dragged herself up, shook grass from her skirt, manipulated the wooden pegs at the score board, and settled in a deep chair beside it. The comfortable murmur, interspersed with shouts of advice and tense moments of watching, began again.

The sun shone warmly down on the old Mackenzie house, and the trees moved heavy green branches high overhead. Heliotrope and stock sent sturdy sweet odors into the still afternoon air; it was almost six o'clock when the sinking sun began to send streamers of mealy light through the lower branches of the trees, and the bees shot by on last hurried errands, and Sanders, the gardener, could start water sprays whirling in the shadier corners.

The water splashed and dripped, the sunshine left the lawn and mounted to the topmost foliage of the elms and pear trees. It spread itself upon them in gold layers of light, and seemed to drip through them and touch the branches beneath with dots of mellow glory.

The second game ended, and Link flung himself exhausted on the grass, his face buried, the thin shirt sticking to his broad shoulders in little darker circles. Harry, infuriated at the outcome, was taking fancy shots from stake to stake. Fox was discussing theatricals; why couldn't they get up a regular play and make a pile of money for something—the hospital or something?

"We could black up, you know."

"Oh, horror!" from Marianne.

And from Barbara a murmur to Link, when he presently rolled over on his back and looked at her smilingly.

"Happy days! And it's so good to be happy."

Too happy, perhaps. It was presently for Marianne to make them less so. She began quite simply with Barbara, on a certain Sunday morning when a dozen of the more enterprising had had an early swim on the Casino beach and were waiting for breakfast in the Casino restaurant.

"This is fun!" said Rita Roach, who, sitting next to her promised husband, was in that happy mood when a girl finds anything and everything fun. "Let's do it every Sunday!"

"It's gorgeous, but I don't know when I can do it again," Barbara confessed frankly. "Kate always sleeps until eight, but this morning she was awake at six. I really thought I couldn't come. However, by a special dispensation, Mrs Duffy was in the kitchen when I went downstairs and she took Kate off my hands. Only I couldn't count on that again!"

Marianne Scott looked up obliquely, smiling.

"Sure that's the reason, Barbara?" she asked, in an undertone.

Barbara was puzzled.

"Perfectly sure. Why?" she asked, warned by Marianne's tone that something unpleasant was afoot.

"Well," Marianne said, with an apologetic air of withdrawing, "I happened to hear you quarreling with Link a few seconds ago, that was all."

"Quarreling?" Barbara frowned, remembering, and laughed suddenly. "Oh, he paid my check for breakfast, and he's always doing it," she complained easily. "I didn't know you had to pay in advance, here. And when the man came to me he merely said, 'The gentleman paid.' So I told Link he mustn't, any more."

"Here comes the coffee!" Link himself, returning from a voyage of financial adjustment, exclaimed thankfully. He slipped into his chair beside Barbara. "Sugar, somebody!" he said. "Harry, help yourself to cream, and pass it up this way."

Barbara could not speak to Marianne again unobserved for several minutes. Then, with a faint frown between her eyes, she went back to the interrupted topic.

"Marianne, what would my quarreling with Link have to do with my not coming swimming?" she demanded blankly.

"Nothing," Marianne answered innocently.

"Wait a minute," said Barbara. "Omelette here," she said capably to the waiter, "poached eggs there—omelette here, too, scrambled to that gentleman—that's right.

"Then what *did* you mean?" she persisted to Marianne, when the meal was in progress again.

"Nothing," Marianne said with a mysterious smile.

"Well, but you must have meant *something*. Why make such a mystery of it?"

"It went through my mind—it's nothing," Marianne said hastily and lightly, "but it went through my mind that you might feel that it was a little better not to have Link—but if you *didn't* feel it, and Link likes to do it," Marianne added, with an air of dismissing the subject sensibly, "and you like to have him do it, why not?"

Barbara looked at her steadily a moment, and the blood crept into her face. Her attitude toward Link during these strange yet not unhappy months of readjustment had been growing only steadily deeper and

keener. She had never seen in it anything to fear, and she did not fear now. But she did not like the look in Marianne's eyes.

"Link has been the best friend any woman ever had," she said bravely and simply. She had said it a thousand times in the last few months. But this morning, for the first time, it had a strange and different ring.

"Exactly!" Marianne answered, laughing with just a touch of patronage in her laughter. "And the question is whether—of course, I was married myself, and I know exactly how one feels!—but still the question is whether it's quite wise."

"You mean," Barbara asked straightforwardly, between two bites of biscuit, "you mean that Barry might object?"

Marianne smiled.

"My dear Barbara, anybody might object!" she answered sharply. "Do wake up—do grow up—do come to your senses!" Marianne added with good-natured impatience.

Barbara continued to look at her gravely, almost with fright in her blue eyes.

"But everyone knows—but everyone knows how marvelous—how extraordinary he's been to me!" she said very faintly. And she sent Link's back, half turned toward her, as he disputed animatedly the question of trout flies with Harry Poett, an appealing glance. "Everyone has said that I would have died if it hadn't been for Link!" she offered, with the first hint of doubt, of uneasiness, in her tone.

"Exactly. And now everyone is saying something else, too," Marianne told her pleasantly.

The blood that had receded from Barbara's face rushed back, and her eyes sparkled dangerously.

"What do you mean, Marianne?"

"Well, simply, that an attractive man and a married woman can't have an extremely close friendship, and be seen together all the time, and—well, breakfast checks and all the rest of it—without starting comment; you know that as well as I do!" Marianne answered defiantly.

Barbara tried to laugh, but it was a shaky laugh.

"I don't think anything could spoil my gratitude and my—my affection for Link," she said quietly. "I can't take you seriously, Marianne. If you heard any gossip of that sort, it was from a pretty poor source. Why, everyone knows I'm married!"

"*Exactly,*" Marianne commented in a triumphant tone. "That's all the trouble."

"Barbara, listen here—what do you think . . ."

The others broke in, and conversation became general. Barbara was left with only an unpleasant impression that somehow Marianne had gotten the best of her in a disagreeable talk. What had started it, anyway, and what a fool she was to care what Marianne Scott thought, or said she thought, which was quite a different affair.

Link spun her home to the Duffy house, and she went into the dining

room in time to gossip over his coffee with her father and feed Kate her cereal. She hugged Kate warmly to her, kissing the silky mop that was under her chin, as the child's head darted about.

The sore feeling grew. How intensely offensive Marianne had been at breakfast—Marianne could be like that. She was a little cat, sometimes. No wonder! Wiser to forget it.

But she could not dismiss it. The sense of having been misjudged and affronted remained. Barbara carried the baby upstairs, put her down in her pen—Link's gift—she hated to be reminded of Link this morning—and made the bed carefully, ordering and airing the room, straightening and dusting.

Kate went down on the same bed, with a pillow and rug, for her nap; Barbara crossed the hall to her father's room and performed for it the same homely duties. Her father was always down on the side porch on Sunday mornings, reading the paper and napping.

It was outrageous that a man and a woman could not have a simple platonic friendship without provoking a lot of silly cackle! Who cared what the town was saying, anyway—vile old women who must put the very worst construction upon everything, if they were to find congenial topics for conversation at all!

Maddening that such folk had power to annoy one, to make one's heart beat faster, and the uncomfortable color flush one's cheeks.

Barbara put on her blue linen gown after luncheon, an old gown, but her best for summer wear, and pulled down the white hat. She would go over to Amy's when Kate awakened; Amy's indignation would be soothing to her own.

Amy and Ward were in the garden, when she arrived, taking pictures of the baby. The nurse held him, Amy held him, Ward held him, blinking and collapsing and pulpy in his christening robe. They photographed him against a background of pinked and tasseled peonies, against the snowball bush, against the grape arbor. They photographed him with his little cousin Kate.

When this excitement was over, and Ward had gone off on a hospital call, Barbara could speak to her sister confidentially.

"We all got up at half-past six this morning, and went swimming, and had breakfast at the Casino."

"Fun!" Amy commented absent-mindedly, rolling little curls of lint from the baby's tiny palms.

"Yes, it was fun. Afterward Link took me home—Dad had just come downstairs. Amy," Barbara added, in a suddenly conscious tone, "Marianne said a funny thing at breakfast—she's awfully catty sometimes, anyway. And I suppose she might be jealous, I don't know. But she hinted, as if it were a sort of joke, you know—that Link and I—— This is so silly!"

Barbara stopped short, laughing, her face scarlet. To her surprise, Amy merely looked up at her thoughtfully and said:

"Well, Barbara, you must have been perfectly aware of *that!*"

The other woman, staring with slightly narrowed eyes, spoke coldly:

"Aware of what?"

"That—that Link likes you. That he probably hopes you—that if anything happened to Barry——" Amy floundered in her turn.

Barbara was looking at her fixedly, her full lower lip caught against her teeth.

"What on earth *could* happen to Barry?" she demanded stonily.

"Nothing, I suppose," Amy murmured meekly.

"You mean you think Link and I have been going too far?" Barbara pursued.

Amy said hastily and placatingly: "*I* don't! But of course people do notice it."

"I see I have done Link a terrible injury," Barbara said quietly, after a pause. Amy felt frightened.

"Oh, now, Barbara, don't be silly!" she pleaded. "You and Link always have been friends, and he saved your life and stood by you when your own husband didn't, and everyone knows it! Lots of people," Amy added, with candor, "think you ought to divorce Barry—really they do."

"And marry Link?" Barbara asked, at white heat.

"They don't say that."

Barbara bit her lip, shrugged, and laughed mirthlessly and lightly.

"Really, I wish people would mind their own affairs," she said patiently, freezingly.

"Well, they see you always together, and you *are* beautiful, Babs, and naturally they put their own construction on it!" Amy explained.

"Oh, naturally they would," Barbara exclaimed darkly, in a passion. "Probably they have me his mistress by this time!" she added, largely to counter-annoy Amy, who loathed vulgar conversation.

Amy said nothing; she frowned faintly at young Atherton Duffy, who was asleep in her lap. And presently Barbara began to talk with great good humor and animation about entirely unrelated subjects.

But the day was spoiled. Her original plan had been to wander over to the Mackenzie garden in the middle of the long afternoon and at least see what was going on. Now she could not do so quite simply.

She loitered at Amy's, and when Ward got back they all took a long drive. It seemed perfectly senseless to Barbara to take the front seat, which Amy was still quite sufficiently the bride to covet, and where Barbara suspected Ward very much wanted Amy to be, and to ramble along the country roads, saying inanely, "There's an adorable new place!" or "Those must have been the Grants, Ward, who yelled at us!"

What was Link doing? Were they all on the side lawn? Had he been wondering what kept her away? Hopes that Ward would think of the Mackenzie garden, too, and would stop there on his way home, suddenly possessed her. But, after that most disconcerting and ridiculous talk with Amy, only an hour or two earlier, she could not well suggest it.

They got out in Santa Cruz for refreshments, lemonades sipped in a big Casino humming with visitors and flies and trembling with bright sea lights. Hundreds on the beach, sleeping among newspapers and sand. Vulgar day, Sunday, upon which even nice persons looked common.

Back at the car, she insisted that Amy take her rightful place on the driver's seat, and Amy, perhaps feeling that she had been sufficiently generous, consented without protest. Barbara sat alone in the back, except for Kate, who was entertaining and alert, in her lap.

"Ward, it's after four. Suppose we stop in at your father's and make a little call and maybe stay for supper?"

"I kind of hate to take the baby home so late, Amy."

"But it's going to be boiling tonight!"

They turned in at the familiar Duffy gate. Barbara's father and Ward's, with two other elderly men, were playing bridge on the shady north porch, Ward's mother was dozing in a litter of scattered Sunday newspapers in the old-fashioned parlor.

To Barbara there was a stupid, glaring ugliness over the world. Sunday afternoon at half-past four was a detestable hour. The house seemed shabbier than usual and smelled hot and dry; odors of the two-o'clock chicken and stewed peaches lingered in the air.

Why wasn't she content to sit on the side lawn with Amy and Mrs Duffy and the babies and various other members of the household, and join the lazy, pleasant gossip of the afternoon? There was nothing the matter; the world was going on happily enough.

But a sense of wrong, loss, and discontent possessed her. She felt herself drawn as by ropes to the Mackenzie house. To get in touch with Link—she hadn't seen him since he brought her home that morning.

Barbara smiled at the absurdity of it! To have seen him eight hours ago, and yet to be longing so hungrily to see him again.

Well, but all this silly talk by Marianne and Amy had intervened, Barbara reflected. This new preposterous suggestion had seemed to change everything, to put them in a new relationship, to set a different, and a very much heightened value upon Link's kindly, brotherly companionship.

Anyway, whatever the cause, she was burning, possessed, in misery until she might see him. She glanced at Mrs Duffy's comfortable, double-chinned face, glanced at Amy, displaying the charms of her baby, glanced beyond to the porch where the men were playing, and sighed exhaustedly.

The moments dragged. It was unthinkable that the rest of the evening, suppertime, bedtime, would go by, without any interruption that meant her friend, that meant Link coming back!

Presently she slowly went from the side lawn to the house with Kate on her shoulder. Kate had her bath at five, in the old wood-encased tin tub on the second floor. Barbara knelt on the floor beside the tub, steadying the small wet body with firm and capable fingers. As a finish, the big sponge was always squeezed on the top of Kate's tangled curls, and sent

drops down on her clean-washed, red, satiny cheeks, and as an absolute last concession, Kate might swim.

Barbara swept her up and down in the water three times, swept her dripping and contorting into the big towel, and retired with her to the dim window to rub her dry.

The bathroom had once been a hall bedroom; it had a wide window seat. While Barbara rubbed her, and spread her small soft hands to dry them carefully, finger by finger, Kate peered interestedly down into the garden.

A strip of garden, a path, a belt of trees and shrubs, and beyond, the country-town sidewalk with Sunday strollers walking up and down in the twilight. The sun had almost gone, but there was plenty of clear shadowless illumination over the deserted chairs on the lawn, with an escaped sheet of newspaper here and there. There was a picket fence beyond the marguerite bushes. On the top of the big trees, red sunlight enameled the leaves, the air was warm and soft and tired after the hot day. A smell of boiling asparagus rose from the kitchen, there was the slamming of a door; Mrs Duffy's voice called to her Chinese boy cook: "Wing, bring up the cheese!"

Barbara could imagine that cheese, pale and tasteless, cut into small, uninteresting squares, flanked with soda crackers. They always had sardines, cheese, and soda crackers on Sunday nights, canned beans and tomato salad. They always had hot tea, and the dim, warm, shabby dining room would presently be scented strongly with it.

"Doggy?" said Kate hopefully, peering into the dusk.

"No doggies!" Barbara made a swooping movement toward the floor, gathered up Kate's soft little soggy raiment, and mounted to the mansard floor, the damp and fragrant baby upon her arm.

Their bedroom, close under the roof, was dim, warm, and stuffy. Barbara looped the stiff curtains at the low, darkening windows, but no air came in. She buttoned Kate into sleepers that were getting too small; when Kate stretched they tightened upon her from head to foot, and stitches creaked threateningly.

Kate sat watching the door suspiciously from her crib, while Barbara flew downstairs for toast, apple sauce, and the indispensable bottle. The toast was consumed in strips, the spoonfuls of apple sauce regularly interspersed between bites. When the plate and saucer were empty, Barbara produced the warm bottle unexpectedly, and Kate seized it in both hands and mouth, and rolled upon it like a little jungle beast upon its prey.

Barbara gave her a parting kiss in the warm back of the neck, and a parting pat on the back of the too-snug sleepers, and, with a glance at window and door, went slowly downstairs again.

There was dimness everywhere, indoors, for the evening was too warm and airless to make the lights welcome: There were murmuring forms, unrecognizable, on the front steps, bulky shadows in the long drawing room. The odor of asparagus ruled every other scent now.

Street lights were lighted, bright pools of radiance sinking down through the trees. Moths and crickets spun into the glare, and marauding cats, creeping below, caught the adventurers as they fell. Motor cars came up the street, sent a second's blinding wheel of brilliance across the garden, and were gone. Groups of men and girls, walking by, scattered little trills of laughter and talk into the dark.

The word "hot" ruled the hour. "Hot!" said the shadows in the parlor as Barbara went by. "Hot!" said the shadows on the steps. "Hot!" shouted the pedestrians on the sidewalk good-naturedly.

Mrs Duffy, flushed and perspiring, came out to the porch and announced supper. They all went in, perhaps sixteen in all, but they seemed a great many, tonight. The dining room was lighted, the bright whiteness was far hotter than the shadowy dusk outside.

Pickles and soda crackers, cheese and sardines—Barbara could not eat. The hot asparagus languished in disorderly points and stalks upon a wide field of buttered toast. Tea scented the room.

Amy sat next her mother-in-law, then Ward, then Barbara, then Professor Atherton. They passed sugar and cream and crackers and pickles.

Where was Link—Link—Link? The question was hammering at her temples, she felt breathless, restless, thirsty, agitated almost beyond endurance.

"Dad, I'm not hungry. I think I'll go sit on the steps."

"Babs, as you go, will you peek into the library and take a look at the baby?" This was Amy.

Amy's baby beautifully asleep on the leather couch. Barbara's baby beautifully asleep upstairs in her crib. Barbara went out to the dark porch, lighted only by a dull red glimmer from the hall light, and by the occasional flashes of motor-car lamps from the street, and sat on the top steps, and stared into warm, motionless velvet blackness.

She had not been there five minutes when a big low car stopped at the gate, and a squarely built man in white flannels jumped out of it.

Barbara's heart turned upside down, plunged, and began to race at double speed. The man, coming rapidly toward the house, was almost upon her when she intercepted him with the single word, "Link!"

"Oh, hello!" he answered in a matter-of-fact tone. He jammed his driving gloves in his side pockets, and sat down on the step beside her. "Say, where were you this afternoon?" he demanded.

Barbara, to her own concern and disgust, found that she could not answer easily. She laughed, faintly and pointlessly, and spread the fingers of her hand lightly over his own, as it rested on the step beside her.

Link turned toward her, she could only see the glint of his eyes in the dark, but she knew from his tone that he was smiling.

"Hello, Babs!" he said again, pleased.

All the disappointment and distress of the day faded away from her, and life was right again. She had been a fool to let them frighten her; everything was quite as it ought to be.

"Had your supper?" asked Link.

"Yes. We have it early here—at six."

"We were going to have a sort of supper at the house, but Tilly sent out a lot of sandwiches at about five," Link explained, "and Fox had a date, and Marianne's sick in bed with a headache, and so I called the supper off. You couldn't go for a drive?"

"Well—Amy's here——" she hesitated. But she had risen to her feet. "Just a few minutes," she stipulated.

Link took the shore road; the soft black air, rushing at them, was cool and salt and scented with kelp and sea. The sky was low, infinitely dark, there was neither moon nor stars. Barbara's heart, as she sat silent and utterly content in her seat beside him, was singing with joy. Nothing else mattered; they were together again.

They were out of the town and running briskly along the shelf of roadway that ran above the sea. Link stopped the car on the point, and they got out and walked to the edge of the cliff.

Other cars had passed them as they came. But they were alone here. The sea murmured busily, rolling shells with little clinking sounds on the rocky points below them. The great breathing surface of the invisible ocean, like some black monster close to the shore, panted in the dark. Beneath their feet the turf was spongy and rough, and yet friendly and sweet-scented and near.

Barbara stood straight and slim, her head thrown back, her soft hair bared, her closed eyes lifted to the infinite bigness above her.

"Link—I'm living, for the first time today!"

He was standing close beside her, now she heard him laugh oddly, close to her ear, as he said:

"Why did you put your hand on mine, on the porch back there?"

Barbara began to tremble. She felt frightened, yet it was a happy sort of fright that ran all through her body, and made her conscious of her coppery hair, with the night air gently blowing it to and fro, and of her toes, and of her slim straight body, and of her lifted throat.

"I don't know," she said, in a low voice. And she stood waiting. She shut her eyes again.

There was a silence, and Link did not move. Then suddenly he turned and walked the hundred feet of the springy, odorous turf that lay between them and the car, and as he walked he said quietly over his shoulder:

"We'd better go back."

It was in that instant that the change came, and she recognized it, and accepted it. They did not speak all the four miles home, and when Barbara got out at the Duffys' gate, she instantly joined the dark figures on the steps, and did not ask Link to delay.

"Who's here?" she asked, stumbling between them. "Amy? Who's this? Dad?"

And she sat down on the steps close to her father and laid her cheek against his sleeve, and locked both hands about his arm.

"Hello, darling," her father said affectionately. "Aren't you going to get out, Link?" he called.

"I've got to get along home," Link said, from the darkness. But almost immediately he did get out of his car, and came up the path, as he had come an hour ago, and sat with them for a little while. But Barbara did not address him directly, nor did he speak to her.

CHAPTER XXI

And that was the beginning of strange days between them. The happy confidence and unthinking intimacy were gone, and although they saw each other almost every day, it was with such constraint, such silences and evasions as to make all the world seem entirely different from the old order.

Barbara had gone upstairs that Sunday night in a mood of breathless exaltation and excitement. Never in her life had her heart beat so fast, never before had she felt the same sense of thrilling confusion of the senses.

She had seemed to fly, to be lifted on wings, she had laughed quiveringly as she stopped to kiss Kate, and adjust the baby for the night; she had stepped about the unlighted room almost as if dancing.

And once in her cotton pajamas, the pajamas that Amy had bought for her on that January day when those who watched her had seen that she was to turn the first hard corner toward convalescence, still she could not get into bed and go to sleep.

Instead, she settled herself at the window sill, and reviewed, with a fluttering sort of joy, the events of the long day. Up in the dawn, and downstairs in the kitchen with Kate. Then to the Casino, and down the hard, white sand of the beach with running bare feet, and into the cold salty shock of the ocean. Link beside her, holding her wet hand in his own, steadying her before the hooped rush of the waves.

Coffee, in the early morning quiet and shimmering lights of the big Casino restaurant. Her hair wet, her face glowing from cold water, the scent of the coffee and rolls delicious in the warm air.

And then Marianne, and Marianne's innuendos—Barbara, looking down through the pear branches at the dark night, smiled to herself, remembering it. Marianne had thought—and Amy, later, had thought——

She went through the hours of the day. That insufferable drive with Ward and Amy, when life had seemed so boring and so squalid. That hot, odorous supper hour in the dining room, with the crackers and sardines and pickles. And then the porch step in the dark, and Link stopping his car at the gate.

Her hand over his. Her hand over his. And, later, his gruff laugh in the sweet, sedge-scented grass of the cliff, beside the dark, invisible sea, and his query: "Babs, why did you put your hand on mine?"

The street was very still now, between the tall lines of the elms and locusts; Barbara could hear a fig drop to the grass from the Carters' big tree, next door. Pools of light still hung high up in the darkness above the street and dripped in white fingers through the heavy foliage. The night was hot.

In the morning, reason returned coldly, and Barbara was wearied and impatient, and felt life strangely flat. She forced herself through her duties before leaving the house, and let Kate toddle beside her to the kindergarten, stopping for a moment at Amy's gate, always with a sense of fatigue and annoyance and disappointment.

Link did not telephone or come to the school this morning, and the hours dragged. The last week of school began badly, the children were restless and excited over vacation plans, and the heat, continuing, exhausted teachers as well as pupils.

Barbara somehow dragged herself through it and took Kate home at two. Any messages or notes or telephone calls? she asked, entering Mrs Duffy's kitchen. None.

None. She tried to sew, to write, to concentrate upon the end-of-the-term bills for pencils and books. No use. A painful restlessness possessed her, a misery of indecision and of hunger undefined.

She took Kate and walked to Amy's house. Amy's dining-room chairs had at last arrived, and she was tremendously excited. The baby was asleep on the side porch under his netting, and Amy and the nurse were dragging furniture about.

Barbara assisted for awhile, hardly hearing what the other women were saying, or appreciating in the least what they were doing, and then, with a confused remark about looking at summer hats, she went on downtown.

It was not far; the Duffy homestead was close to the shopping district, and Ward had bought a home even farther in, as suitable for a general practitioner. Kate had only a few blocks to toddle, excited and adventurous blocks, before they were among the stores, with big plate-glass windows on both sides of the street, and the languid desultory buying and selling of a hot June afternoon pursuing its lazy course between dry goods shop and drug store, market and grocery.

As usual there were farmers' spattered and shabby cars parked outside of the big hardware shop of "Mackenzie & Company." Its shining windows, flashing with steel and brass, sent metallic lights into the burning afternoon. A plow, touched up on its dark green paint with flecks and lines of scarlet, and lettered in gold, rested permanently on the sidewalk. Its ground flanges, silver and gray, twinkled under the shade of the striped awning.

Miss Skinner, the milliner, was putting a yellow hat into a window already embellished by several hats, and by a card saying, "Choice, two dollars." At the fruit stand streamers of red, white, and blue ribbon, attached to an electric fan, and flying in long jerks over the display of

cherries and apricots, caught Kate's fancy, and she shouted at them approvingly. Cars, fumbling their way from the county road, between the red-and-blue gas station, and the green-and-white gas station, discovered the neat sign, "To the Casino and beach," and turned left in a line. The summer had begun.

Barbara bought Kate a little blue chambray bonnet for a dollar, and Kate was delighted. And coming out of the hat shop, she saw Link, on the sidewalk, a few feet away.

They stood talking for a few minutes. Link picked up the baby, well wearied by now, and held her on his big, square shoulder.

He was very pale; Barbara felt her own breath and color betray her. He had on his brown homespun suit with the belt and pleats. She loved every thread of it; he had often worn it when he came to see her in the hospital.

"Any croquet today?" Barbara asked, looking up from under the brim of the old white hat, that was still, in its gipsyish smallness and sauciness, intensely becoming to the ruffled copper hair and blue eyes.

"Oh, yes, I guess so, at about five."

"Then Kate and I'll wander over that way."

"I won't be there, but probably Lucy and Otis and Fox will," Link said casually.

The day went dark for Barbara.

"You won't!"

"I don't think so. I don't believe I can make it." He glanced, frowning, at his wrist watch.

"What time is it?" Barbara asked, chilled by his manner.

He had to look again, briefly, and flushing.

"About four."

"Well, do try to make it if you can," Barbara urged.

There was an awkward pause, absolutely new in their relationship.

"I just had a wire from my father," said Link then. "He and Margaret got into New York yesterday. They're coming straight home. Margaret is bringing a beau, as far as I can make out."

"I thought they were going to be abroad all summer." She and Link were talking formally, politely, like persons just introduced.

"No, he says that they're coming right home." He took the wire from his pocket, and opened it, and read it again, seriously nodding his head.

And she saw that he was embarrassed, ill at ease, that he wanted the conversation to be over.

"Anything doing tonight, Link?" she suggested. Her color heightened at her taking what was usually his query.

A pause. He kissed the soft little hand that Kate had plastered squarely over his mouth, and answered without meeting Barbara's eye.

"Not that I know of."

In another minute she and Kate were wandering along the sidewalk again, and Barbara felt more utterly at a loss than before, felt sick and forlorn. She had been longing just to see Link and to hear his voice, and

now she had seen him and heard him, and the situation was worse than ever.

That evening, she took her father to an illustrated lecture, "The Truth About Europe." Link was there, everyone was there, it was a social as well as an intellectual event.

But although Link smiled and waved at them, and presently came up for a few good-natured, confidential words about the trouble they were having with the moving-picture machine, his attentions stopped there, and left Barbara actually sick with excitement and distress.

That night was cooler, and she lighted her night lamp at about eleven o'clock, when she went upstairs to bed, and went about the room brushing her web of shining, coppery hair, fussing with creams, soaps, and powders, frowning as the bright little curved blades of the scissors clipped at her hands.

Finally she gave a deep sigh.

"He's quite right!" she said aloud. "I must be crazy, and he's quite right!"

And she went to the bureau and picked up the silver framed picture of Barry that was her only likeness of him.

It had been enlarged from a fortunate snapshot taken by Fox fully three years ago. He had been photographed down on the rocks at the shore below the Casino, his white shirt open at the throat, his beautiful dark head bare, one of his splendidly formed legs, in becoming knickers, raised and resting on a boulder, and the laughter she knew so well lighting his handsome face and showing the even line of his white, strong teeth.

The rich wave of black hair was blown and ruffled by the wind, tossed backward, and his big arms were crossed and folded, as if by his attitude he defied the world.

Those same knickers she had darned for him more than once, that same shirt, with its romantic open collar, was the one she wore now when she played croquet. And that smile——

"Whelks, Barberry Bush! Let's go home and cook ourselves a little mess of whelks!"

She could hear him. Her spoiled, petulant, whimsical, unmanageable boy. The young husband who had taken her so carelessly and ruined her life—or at least done his best to ruin her life—without either compunction or regret.

The long, wet days on the ranch came back to her; they seemed like a dream. The rain falling, the fireplace smoking, the sea fuming on the lonely shore. She remembered the ice-cold pantry, with the mashed turnips and scraped, splintery pot roast on a plate, the smells of mice and damp and rotting wood. The fatigues, the despairs. . . .

Sometimes he had been cruelly unkind to her, he had been selfish and unreasonable always. Yet she was his wife. She was married. It was not for her to find a kinder man, a gentler, wiser man, and to give that man her heart.

The irrevocable agony of it smote her for the first time. She could never be anything to Link Mackenzie, nor he to her. Their happy time of playing, of trusting and seeking each other innocently and openly, under the eyes of all Cottonwood, was over.

Barbara put the picture carefully back on the bureau and went to her bed. She knelt down beside Kate and covered her face with her hands. And suddenly sobs shook her, her throat choked with them, and her face was wet.

She saw Link again on the day that Margaret and his father got home from long journeying. It was a cold, foggy midsummer afternoon, and there were fires lighted in the big Mackenzie mansion.

Link's father had refused to have any part in the general festival of welcome, and when, in the early afternoon, neighbors and friends began to flock in, he disappeared to visit the office.

But Lucy was there, excited and happy, and Margaret, tall and pretty in a Paris frock; Marianne was there, and Fox, Harry, Joe, Otis, and all the boys.

Barbara came late with Amy. She was pale, but all the more beautiful for that; she wore a thin, lacy black dress that was new, and a small black hat, pulled down over the shining glory of her hair.

Link saw her the instant she entered by the open hall doorway, and came to be in her neighborhood. She and Margaret kissed each other, and there was the usual chatter of questions and replies and laughter.

Then Link came up, and she gave him her hand without smiling, and raised her somber blue eyes.

"I like your dress so much, Barbara," he said in an odd tone, clearing his throat.

"Isn't it pretty? It was an old one of Mrs Duffy's, and she was going to send it to the rummage sale, so I bought it. Mrs Ossler and I made it over."

There seemed nothing else to say. They stood silent in the big noisy room, Barbara smiling faintly and wistfully up at him from under the brim of the little black hat, Link's eyes devouring her hungrily. The perfume of summer flowers was in the air, the delicate scent of tea. Barbara, slim in her soft draperies of lace, baffled, heartsick, presently turned away.

He followed her. They were in the deserted hall together.

"Could you come down to the stable and see the car? I turned my old one in—the new one's just come," Link suggested.

"I'd love to." Her voice was faint and troubled like that of a child.

They went out the side door and across the fog-shrouded garden. The sun, only a heavy yellowed patch on the sky toward the west, was burning warmly through the fog; there was an unearthly silence in the veiled side garden. The currants' green cottony leaves and the long murderous tentacles of the blackberry vines were alike beaded in crystal.

Far away there was the droning of foghorns down by the shore. Short

barks from motor cars sounded now and then in the street, and were still. Link had run the new car into the old carriage house, adjoining the stable; there was no place for it in the garage.

He and Barbara walked through the stable into the pleasantly clear, shadowless big room, swept clean and bare, smelling of oats and harness oil. Old saddles and harnesses were hung on pegs along a wall; handsome old checked buggy robes, folded neatly, hung on a rail. Hay still clung to the mangers, and grain filled all the cracks in the floor and lay in little furrows on the wooden steps that led up to the loft.

The carriage house and the stable were really one enormous building. Barbara lingered in the latter; there was something old-fashioned and sweet about the stable. Link's beautiful bay mare put her ears back, rolled a nervous white eye at them; the sorrel, his father's horse, continued to gnaw the sides of his box stall. A sudden hammering of frightened feet quieted as they came nearer the third horse, the big farm Percheron, who was fastened by a short bridle rope in a stall. The great convulsed flanks strained, and were still.

The fog, following them noiselessly like an enemy, crept to the very door, dissolved, merged itself back into the creamy white world behind it.

The man and the woman, standing still, regarded the new car attentively with eyes that saw it not at all.

Presently Link said:

"I suppose it's better—not to see—each other?"

Barbara trembled; she did not move her eyes from the shining red-and-black wheels.

"I think it is," she said, very low.

"For a long while, huh?" Link asked, clearing his throat.

"I think so."

The man tried to laugh hardily, and failed.

"I don't see why!" he exclaimed boldly.

Barbara was silent. After a long minute Link added:

"It's easy to say it." And in a resentful and bewildered tone he added: "I tell you I've been in hell this week!"

"It seems," began Barbara in a low tone, "that they have all been thinking that—well, that we were simple!"

Both were silent. A chicken, fussing and rustling in the hay, far upstairs, clucked angrily. The big yellowed teeth of the sorrel gnawed noisily in the stillness. The Percheron's heavy feet clattered again.

"These days, when I've not seen you, have shown me that—that perhaps we *were* simple," Link presently said.

He put his arms about her, her face was against the rough cloth of his suit, her hat was pushed back. Barbara had one instant of violent protest; it immediately subsided, and was forgotten.

Their lips were together, and she felt that he would draw out her very life in their first real kiss. Their hearts were beating madly now, and although Barbara was conscious that Link spoke occasionally, the words

were so incoherent, mumbled against her bared hair, that she could distinguish among them only her name.

After a moment, she stood back from him, panting, and holding him off with a hand against his shoulder.

"I can't help it, dear—I love you!" Link said, with an exultant laugh.

Barbara's face was white, and there was a strained look in her eyes.

"You mustn't tell me that, Link," she whispered.

Link instantly grew sober and dropped his hands from her arms, by which he had been lightly pinioning her.

"No, I suppose not," he agreed heavily. And there was a long silence. "But, Barbara—" he began again, awkwardly and timidly, following her a few irresolute steps—"you—you——?" He stopped.

"Yes, God help me!" she said in a whisper. And she put both hands over her face, and turned away.

"You won't divorce him?" Link asked, after a silence, clearing his throat.

"He's my husband," Barbara said simply.

Link did not speak again. They went silently back to the house together.

There he saw her presently at the tea tray; Lucy relinquishing her post gladly, and Barbara beginning busily to pour. The lines of the black lace gown were exquisitely becoming to her slenderness and fairness; when she raised her face, under the new hat, there was all a child's wistful, weary bewilderment stamped upon it.

Old Mrs Bonner settled beside her, ready for endless cups of tea. Norah passed sandwiches; Fox Madison came out with somebody's empty cup; the second was to be just like the first, please, with a little of everything. Yes, sugar, yes, cream, and yes—awfully weak.

Link, unobserved, stood in the doorway, watching her. He watched the quick, slim hands, the lifted glance, the serious, questioning look that preceded her slow smile. Somebody considerately asked her if she wouldn't like some tea herself, and she answered that of course she would.

She poured herself a cup. But he noticed that she did not taste it, did not seem to remember it again.

Presently she frowned faintly, and partly turning her head, looked straight at the doorway almost behind her where he was stationed, as if he had called her. And instantly the glorious color flooded her white face, and the strange liquid brilliance of which he had caught just a glimpse, in the stable a few minutes ago, lighted her blue eyes.

Then, suddenly, she was gone. His attention left the tea table only for a few seconds, when someone came up to speak to him. But when he turned back, somebody else was pouring, and the chatter was that Barbara had just gone home with Amy.

Link acted, from this time on, according to no code. If he could have thought at all, he must have thought of his father, his faith, of Barbara's

bond to Barry du Spain. But he had long passed the state of being able to think.

He lived wrapped in the consciousness of Barbara, and in that alone. She was there, the slender woman with the coppery hair, there in the old Duffy house, walking to Amy's, walking to school, and his one desire was to be near her always. Her little shabby hats, her simple frocks, her quiet, troubled glances and uneasy monosyllabic replies, were all he wanted. Nothing else was of any consequence, because nothing else existed.

One August evening, about two weeks after his father's return, he walked in Mrs Duffy's garden with Barbara, and she asked him not to see her again. For the present, anyway.

"Other people do it," he pleaded.

"Get divorces? I know. But that would break my father's heart and probably kill your father. Don't let's talk about it."

"Barbara, they'd make an awful fuss for a little while. And then, when they saw how madly happy we were, they'd forgive us."

And after a silence, he added:

"You can't love me, or you wouldn't be able to be so cool."

To this Barbara countered presently:

"I'm the one who can't stand it. I can't eat—I don't sleep, I don't seem to be able to sleep. It's like—being burned alive."

"Barbara, I'll wait as long as you like—I'll be patient, you'll see. But in your heart you must know that it's going to be this way, that you and I are going to be married!"

"Link," she said gravely, "please don't talk so. I *am* married. It makes me feel so—common, to have you talking of divorce and marriage to me. There's something—disgusting about marrying one man, and then, in a few years, in less than a year after one has been living with him, cooking for him, worrying about his finances and anxious for his success—to be kissing another man!

"I'm not that sort! I can't see my way out of this at all, but I know your way isn't the right one. And I'm going to ask you—solemnly, as solemnly as I've asked anybody anything, in all my life, to try to help me."

He caught her to him, kissed her; he felt her unresisting in his arms. There was no response from the beautiful, fragrant lips.

"You make it very hard for me," she said simply, when she was free.

"Barbara, you are made of iron, I think!" Link muttered in despair.

After a long silence, she started walking slowly toward lights, voices, toward the porch.

"I have to be," she offered resolutely.

"Would you feel differently if we got in touch with Barry, if he didn't mind?"

"I've written Barry."

"You asked him if he would fight a divorce?"

"I asked him—to come home. No, Link," Barbara said more forcefully, with the new sternness that had developed in her so lately, "it's all

clearer to me than to you—expiation, sticking it out, the need for facing the hardest thing there is to face. It's what I have to do. I've been weak in my life, and careless—perhaps my marriage was weakness and carelessness, I don't know. I know that there's a man to whom I and my child belong. I can't throw them both over just because he has disappointed me."

And, as if to confirm her words, from the house, black, tall, and squared with lighted windows against the warm summer sky, there came a voice:

"Mrs du Spain! Bar'bry! Your baby's awake!"

She flitted from Link's side in the darkness. She was gone.

Her sheer, dogged courage astonished him. He knew she must be consumed with the need of him as he was of her. Yet she sought no occasion of meeting, and when by chance they did meet, she had steeled herself to a few brief, commonplace words, to utterly insignificant glances, and to almost the aspect of indifference. He saw that she was thinner, graver, that there was always a hurt, puzzled look in her eyes, but she always protested to his different comments that she was well, she was fine, everything was going well with her.

Watching Cottonwood only noted that the friendship between them had cooled to mere acquaintance, and the local paper regularly predicted the return to town of Barry du Spain, whose *Napoleon Third* had been one of the artistic successes of New York's theatrical season. The word "artistic" was perhaps inserted to explain the fact that Barry's play had been performed but eight times, and had closed after exactly one week. The paper generally added that Mrs du Spain and daughter Kate would probably return to New York with the playwright in the fall.

And Barbara allowed herself only one weakness. Sometimes, when she knew herself safe from observation, she walked past the Mackenzie house, and looked in upon its white brick magnificence, bowered in her great trees, and thought of Link as a little boy there, and found, with her puzzled, thoughtful eyes, the windows of his big room. It came to be an almost daily need with her, this glimpse of the place that had known all his sheltered, happy life, and from whose wide halls and spacious rooms, smooth lawns and fragrant gardens, she was forever shut away.

And then, one morning, just before the one o'clock closing, he appeared in her schoolroom. His face was pale, but there was an odd light in it, and a strange shining in his eyes.

"Barbara," he said, coming to the desk, and ignoring the score of staring little children as if they did not exist, "don't let me frighten you. I've got news!"

She sent a quick glance toward Kate, contentedly marshaling weaving straws on a slate.

"Barry?" she whispered.

"He's all right—I've not heard anything of him, that is," Link said. "But suppose I told you that you are not married to him at all? Suppose I told you that you are not his wife?"

She looked at him with a faint frown, displeased. The room began to go around her.

"I'd say that you were crazy, that's all."

He caught her hands, there were tears on his cheeks.

"Barbara," he said, trying to smile, "it's true."

CHAPTER XXII

NOT MARRIED to Barry? But what *nonsense.*

Barbara was frightened, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry. Link caught her hand tightly, reassuringly, and had hardly loosened his grip when she dismissed the children and went with him bewilderedly to the street. The whistles were shrilling one o'clock, it was a sunshiny autumn day, mild and hazy and sweet.

At the gate she hesitated, she spoke dazedly.

"Dad—I'll have to see Dad. He's at Amy's today, I think."

Link's car was at the school gate, but they left it there, and walked to Amy's, only around the corner. Barbara was breathing hard, her eyes looked bewildered. She did not speak.

Amy and her father were at the lunch table. Without preamble, Barbara, sitting down next to her father, and catching his hand, said, in the vague puzzled voice she had used before:

"Dad, Link just came up to school. It seems——"

She frowned and stopped, and Link, transferring Kate from his arm to a seat, and sitting down himself on Professor Atherton's other side, took up the story.

"I kind of scared Barbara, maybe. But I—" his voice broke upon an embarrassed and excited laugh—"I got hold of some news today that kind of knocked me flat!" he said.

"Barry?" Amy surmised swiftly, as Barbara had.

"Not Barry, no, although it has to do with Barry. Amy," Link interrupted himself to question suddenly, "you remember that clergyman, Hutchinson, who was here for awhile as assistant at St Rita's?"

Amy looked at him, perplexed, looked at Barbara, who was anxiously studying her father's face as he received the news.

"Well, certainly," she admitted warily.

"It seems," Link burst out, "that he wasn't a clergyman at all!"

There was a moment of stupefied silence, then Amy said:

"Ward read in the paper, a night or two ago, that he'd been arrested for stealing or forgery or something in Oakland, but nothing was said of his not being really a clergyman."

Another pause. Kate crunched audibly on zwieback, the curtains at Amy's windows moved softly in the noon breeze. In the kitchen, Amy's new cook was furiously beating something with an egg whip.

"Why, then, Barbara," Amy pursued slowly, with a staring look, "you're not married!"

"That," Barbara agreed faintly, "is what Link says. What do you think, Dad?" she questioned.

The Professor rumpled his thinning hair. There was a pause.

"I don't know what to think, dear," Professor Atherton said. "This is a—this is a most extraordinary thing! Amy, where's Ward?"

"Oh, that's just what I was thinking!" Amy snatched the extension telephone that was never far from the doctor's elbow. She jiggled the receiver furiously, just as Ward's triple honk announced him, at the side gate, and beginning to be tremendously excited, flung the news at him hysterically as he came in. Ward dazedly listened as he took his rolled napkin out of its ring and fell upon his belated meal.

"Link saw in the paper that this man Hutchinson was arrested, and he telephoned to Oakland and got some information about it. This afternoon's paper's going to have the whole story—for he married several other couples besides Barbara and Barry—he married the little Prince girl, we went to that wedding, and he married——"

This was Amy. Link interrupted her; Barbara, very white, and clinging to her father's arm, did not speak at all.

"I not only telephoned Oakland," Link said, "but I went over to Judge Cobb's office just now, and he looked it up for me. He says that the couples Hutchinson married are not married at all. And then, about an hour ago," added Link, "I called the Oakland Chief of Police again, and he says there is no mistake about it, they have the man's whole history; he never was ordained. It's going to be a big scandal, and I just happened to get hold of it before the papers did."

It was all like a confused dream to Barbara; Amy's dining room, tomatoes and lettuce in the blue bowl, graham gems and blackberry pie, Dad looking so amazed and helpless over his cooling tea, Link flushed under his sunburn, eager, strangely talkative.

"I suppose they'll all be married again as fast as they can," she suggested, frowning, speaking for the first time.

"By golly, it's funny, when you think of it that way!" Ward burst out boyishly with a grin. "I can see Mrs Prince getting hold of Roy Cutter and Mary!"

Amy voiced the thought that was burning in all their hearts.

"But *you* won't, Barbara?" she asked.

Barbara's quiet look met hers, she moved her eyes to Kate, whose Uncle Ward was feeding her surreptitious tastes of chicken gravy.

"It makes her illegitimate," Barbara said, still in the strange, lifeless, puzzled, mild voice she had used before.

No one answered, and presently she said herself what they were all eager to say.

"Not in any real sense, it doesn't, of course. It would be ridiculous to worry about that!"

She sat silent, her elbow on the table, her chin cupped in her hand.

"One wonders what would be the *right* thing to do?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't think you owe Barry du Spain much, Barberry," her father offered, in the silence.

"The extraordinary thing is," Barbara answered, in a tone more like her old spirited voice than any she had used in months, "the extraordinary thing is that, if I'm not Barry's wife, I'm—" she spread her hands in an eloquent gesture, arched her eyebrows—"I'm nothing!" she finished artlessly.

The others suddenly burst into shaken laughter, but it was to be observed that Link was pale, and his smile was strained. The look of fear and hope in his eyes made Amy's motherly heart ache.

"Exactly!" said Ward.

Barbara mused, scowling faintly, her eyes very bright.

"Well, I'm not going to let myself think about it until I know, and I'm not going to talk about it!" she said, after another silence during which they all watched her expectantly. And, smiling at them all, suddenly face and mood changed, and the tears began to run down her face. Blindly, her arm crooked childishly over her face, she got up, and stumbled to her father's chair, and sat on his knee, with her arms about his neck, her face buried on his shoulder, and her coppery hair touching his white hair. And he comforted her, holding the slender figure tightly, and half laughing and half scolding her as she sobbed.

"You mustn't cry, Babs, it isn't your fault!" Amy said, blinking away tears herself.

"I'm crying," Barbara admitted, in a muffled voice, "for fear it isn't true!" And at this there was laughter again.

But it was true, as the other "Hutchinson brides" found to their confusion. There was some good-natured laughter in the town as they and their partners hurried into legitimate wedlock, but for Barbara's case a more respectful feeling prevailed. Everyone knew that she had been badly treated, and there was a general satisfaction that she did not have to abide by the consequences of her unfortunate marriage.

The matter of the annulment was simple; a mere putting on record the fact that there never had been a legal union. Barbara and her father and Judge Cobb settled it in fifteen minutes, and afterward, rather white and quiet, in spite of her unquestionable satisfaction in this unexpected turn of events, she and her father, Amy, and the babies took the car and went up the old Mesa Trail to the mountain top, and spent a whole day there, talking and resting and planning for the time to come.

A strange day, a dreamy happy day, set between the hard months that bound her to Barry and the hour that would give her to Link. Barbara was silent and abstracted, but Amy could read aright the light of utter peace and content in her eyes.

The next morning she went again to Judge Cobb's office and had a talk

with him. And coming out, she walked to St Rita's, and discussed the whole matter, from beginning to end, with the pastor.

"You're as free as air, my dear!" said the old man, who had known her from babyhood, and liked her.

"You mean *morally* free?" the girl asked anxiously. "We've had a child, you know, Barry and I. Wouldn't that make one *obliged* to remarry the father?"

"Not necessarily. Marriages are sometimes annulled," her adviser reminded her. "A marriage might be annulled because a girl was under age, for example. I don't believe anyone would expect her to remarry the man, immediately it was legally possible. No, you've been the victim of a fraud, and as far as you're concerned, you acted in good faith. Now that legally—for, mind you, this isn't anything but a legal question—now that legally you are free, you're not bound to do anything. The law would hold you tight enough if the fraud had broken the other way, you may be sure of that!"

And in conclusion he came to the door.

"Go into the church there and see the new altar," he suggested. "And remember I'll marry you to the best man in the parish the minute you say the word!"

Barbara went into the church and knelt down at the altar and cried. But they were tears of joy.

That night, Link came to see her, and she went away with him for an hour's drive, in the summer darkness, in the new car. And again they left the car on the cliff and walked across the short, turfy grass above the sea, and sat staring out over the mysteriously moving waters.

There was a moon tonight, whitening the world, sending lacy shadows from the low mallow bushes and the beach grass; gulls, walking busily in the slow, creaming circles of the waves, were reflected in shallow shining water on the strand.

Barbara leaned against Link's shoulder, their fingers were locked. She felt as if, after a turbulent voyage, she had made harbor at last. There was restfulness, there was deep, satisfying peace about being near him, about the grip of his big arm, and the sound of his pleasant, deep voice.

"I love you. You are the most wonderful woman in the world," he said.

"I love to hear you say so, Link."

They turned their faces together, but their kiss tonight was a child's kiss.

"Barbara, if you could know what it means to me—the thought of taking you home to our house, of having you always there!"

"And if you could know what it means to me to come!"

"I can't get over it, I'm dazed. Every little while I go back to a week ago, when I was half crazy, worrying, wondering——"

"I know." Her voice trailed off into an infinitely contented silence, and moonlight and the peeping of the gulls again held the cliff.

"Link, isn't it marvelous, the love of a man and a woman?" Barbara asked, after awhile.

"I was thinking of that. I was thinking of our breakfasting together—of Saturdays and Sundays, when everyone will come to us for croquet and supper. Always together, Barberry! Imagine the runs in the car——" His voice thickened; he kissed the top of her hair.

"I can't believe that you and I are going to be married!"

"You're sure you're happy about it? You *do* love me?"

"Oh, Link, too much. How could I help it? You've stood by me in the very darkest hours of my life. I'd be dead, if it weren't for you. You're always in the back of all my thoughts—there's nothing else.

"Why, I've tried," Barbara began again after a pause, "I've tried my best to get interested in Dad, or Amy, or anything else, during these days when I thought I had to give you up—and it's no use! Every street corner means you, means the thought of your turning into it unexpectedly, and every shop you *might* be in, buying something. Every telephone call, or letter, or man walking along the sidewalk, has been you—until it's been somebody else!"

"Oh, my God," Link said, more in prayer than as an ejaculation, "you don't have to tell *me!*"

The sweetness, the softness and youth of her, rested against his shoulder, her satiny-smooth warm fingers were in his own; they talked, or they were silent, it was of no consequence. Life had brought them together; they were never to be separated again.

"When will you marry me, Barberry?"

"Oh—I haven't got that far, even thinking. What about our birthday?"

"Our birthday! Christmas Eve! Good Lord, this is only August!"

"Our birthday has terrible memories, too," said Barbara's rich voice slowly, in the dark. "A year ago," she added, musing, "I was down at the hacienda, cooking and washing, and caring for the hens! And Barry was terribly—terribly unhappy, and that made me unhappy. It was raining—at about this time. Perhaps a little later. But how it rained and rained!"

"Well, if you think I'm going to wait for our birthday, you're mistaken!" Link said, cheerfully reverting to the previous topic. "Why not right away? Why not a week from today? I want my wife."

The thought made her senses swim with a sort of heady sweetness, but her laugh protested.

"Link, I have to get—things."

"What things?"

"Oh, a dress, and shoes—Amy thinks you can't get decent shoes in Cottonwood, but I saw some beauties in Washington Street today."

"Did you, darling? And did you stop and think about being married in them?" Link asked, diverted.

"Well, I felt happy—I was walking home from church. And I think of them, a little!" Barbara confessed.

"Well, if not a week—you mean that a month won't really be eno time to get them in, Babs?"

"I mean that I'll talk to Dad tomorrow, and tomorrow night, if haven't anything else to do, you might come in to supper, and h stewed tomatoes and brown betty, and we'll talk about it."

"Not more than a month," he pleaded.

"Not more than a month," she agreed. "But I can't believe it," she again. "I can't believe that I'll be Mrs Lincoln Mackenzie, charg things to you at shops, and having cards with your name on them."

And over and over again in the days that followed she said to A or her father, or to Link again:

"I simply can't believe it!"

Her own tremendously augmented importance was one of the thi that dazed her. Cottonwood flocked to the Duffy house, presents invitations flooded every mail. The shopkeepers were gracious, the cashier of the Bank came out to the sidewalk to talk and laugh with happily engaged pair, all the world smiled on Barbara du Spain- Barbara Atherton, as the wedding license must read—and Link M kenzie, whose wife she was so soon to be.

Link's aunt sent her magnificent lace, her mother's lace once, and her silver. Inez dragged herself into clothes and shoes long enough act as hostess at an engagement dinner. Lucy and Margaret were i fatigable.

But the attitude of Link's father was, after all, the one element gave Barbara keenest satisfaction. The old man had asked Link's sw heart, and her family, to dine with him, immediately upon the publ tion of the strange circumstances of her supposed first marriage.

They had all sat talking pleasantly and easily enough through beginning of the rather imposing affair, but long before the chicken served, Link knew his girl had won his father, and after that Barb had her own way with him.

She made no visible effort; she was always quite simple, direct, entirely natural with him; Link thought he had never seen her look lovely as when her earnest, wistful blue eyes were turned upon his fat and her wide, radiant smile broke across her face, in answer to so thing his father had said. The dinner started harmoniously, it went

Afterward, anyone who knew old Major Tom might easily have in preted his feelings. For beside the fire that evening, with Margaret his knee, and Link balanced on the arm of Barbara's chair opposite talked of his own early days in Cottonwood, and of the childr mother, always, in him, a sign of felicity. Professor Atherton could member when there was no High School, no Casino, no houses at below Skinner's Bridge. When he was courting Barbara's mother at Mrs Bush's home in River Street . . .

The conversation went back and forth comfortably, between the two old men, the younger members of the group listening in amusement and superiority. And to Barbara the whole evening seemed almost unendurably sweet. To be here in Link's house, beside his father's hearth, with her own father and sister sharing this wonderful hour of hospitality and reminiscence, was to be more than merely happy; there was a dramatic, a thrilling, and a completely satisfying quality about it that she had never known in her life before.

Link had always been her friend, and of late years he had been oddly and steadily her champion and her confidant; she had known, without a word between them to express it, that Link cared for her happiness in a very special way.

Now she saw him in a different light, as the man who was within a few weeks to be her husband. And she saw in him a definiteness, a confidence, a protecting gentleness and tenderness that were quite new.

Every school day he came to get her at one o'clock. Sometimes then they went to the Duffys' house for lunch; more often to Link's house, where Barbara came to be quite at home among the tempered lights and shadows of the big dining room, where the family silver flashed at her solemnly, and where Norah went about noiselessly with platters of fried chicken and fluffy rolls. Now and then Lucy entertained them, in her doll's house across the road, all wicker furniture and chintz and bridal linens.

Afterward there was always some new and fascinating thing to do. If they were in the Mackenzie house, they might go upstairs and look at the big rooms that were being put in order for their occupancy.

The woodwork of the big doors and the deep old window sill was being painted creamy white; Barbara herself picked the orchid and gray curtains that were to hang at the high windows. All the furniture had been moved out, now, for paperers and painters; there were gently waving branches outside, and wide fresh breadth and space within.

She and Link, sometimes with Amy or Lucy, stepped over buckets and planks and stood looking at the damp walls, the fine old fireplaces, the enormous bathroom, all glass and tiles. They would speak to the workmen, debate, stand watching, with tireless fascination.

Below the windows the garden burned in motionless autumn glory; the trees were still in heavy leaf, but there were red-cheeked apples hidden now among the dusty, blue-gray leaves, and the air had the crystal clearness of the season's end.

And in the old house were the stir and excitement of a change. Link and Barbara were to have a big room on the second floor, over the south garden. Beyond their bath and dressing rooms was Kate's nursery, and beyond that a small sunny room just over the front door, a sewing room in the old days, but to be Kate's playroom now. And on the other side, facing east, and catching, through oak and elm leaves, the full flood of the morning sun, was a square wood-paneled room that would be a sort

of upstairs living room and sitting room for the newly married pair.

This was enough, more than enough, for Barbara. She caught her breath when the realization came, in odd moments of clear vision, that all this was for her; the delicate papers, the fresh new hangings, the white doors and the window sills with their sunshine and their fragrance.

All the rest, too. For Link's father would spend some of his time in the East, when Margaret was married, and for the rest of the time would be his daughter-in-law's guest in his own home.

"We'll try it anyway, won't we, Barbara?" the old man asked, with his shrewd, keen glance. And Barbara, all roses, answered in her fluttered, happy voice: "Oh, we might *love* it!"

So that was arranged, and she could explore the whole place with Link, with the strange, shaken feeling that some day she would be its mistress. Her bright, pretty blue eyes, shy and astonished and admiring, fell upon the tapestries and brocades, the mahogany and rugs and oil paintings of the old-fashioned stately drawing rooms, the billiard room and library, the wide, clean pantries flashing with glass and silver, the china closet with the Doulton and the Haviland ranged in rows.

In the kitchen, Tilly Smith, who had known her all her life, greeted her affectionately. Tilly displayed her wide range, shining black, with the fire twinkling under the graduated rings of the stove plates, her new white gas stove, her cabinet, sink, and storerooms, her ice box—a little room in itself—and the small room where the maids and men had their meals.

Tilly's daughter was to be Kate's nurse, an arrangement that made Barbara want to laugh. It seemed ridiculous that her wild gipsy baby should have a maid to herself.

"I guess Mr Link didn't see this coming!" said Tilly, with relish. "You in here as Misses Mackenzie!"

Barbara flushed deliciously.

"I guess none of us saw it coming, Tilly!"

"Well," said Tilly, snapping open an oven door, glancing within, and snapping it shut again upon a wonderful odor of baking, "my sister-in-law, Jim Clute's wife, was sayin' yes'day that Mis' Barb'ry Atherton was in luck! 'Well,' says I, 'I guess Mr Link Mackenzie's got some of the luck!' "

"You might have told her that Mr Link Mackenzie knows it!" Link told her, smiling down at Barbara with that firm, that almost unearthly expression of happiness in his gray eyes that always made her heart beat fast for joy.

Barbara looked up at him with her dewy, grave smile. It was all too wonderful, too like a strange, happy dream.

She stood in the room that was to be Kate's night nursery, a few days before the wedding, and she and Link, who were alone, spoke of the child.

"Those are Lucy's windows, across the trees there," Barbara said in

a low tone, as if she were speaking half to herself, "and Amy's only a few blocks away. What a happy place, and what a home and room and garden for a little girl to grow up in!"

"I hope she'll never know the difference—never know that I'm not really her father," Link said.

Barbara sent him a sidewise glance, and there was a sweetness in her smile that made his head swim.

"I'm not afraid of that."

"She's going to be beautiful," Link added thoughtfully.

"She'll boss the whole crowd of them!" Barbara predicted contentedly.

His arm tightened about her; he did not speak. They stood silent in the airy, sunshiny room, mottled with green tree shadows, that was to be the nursery.

"I wonder," Barbara said, when they were walking to her home a few minutes later, "I wonder if I will ever see Barry again? If he didn't feel himself bound when he thought he and I were married, one wonders what he'll feel now. I used to despair, waiting and wondering, down at the hacienda, praying for some way to wake him up—to bring him to the realization that we were really man and wife, that we had to fight out our fight together! He never got it at all. It takes a developed man, I suppose, to make a good husband. And Link—Link," she finished, with a note of dreamy sadness in her voice, "but for the strangest accident in the world, but for the fact that the man who married us wasn't in holy orders at all, I would have been bound to him forever. The tragedy of it!"

Link, sauntering at her side, turned to smile at her. He made no comment. The beauty of an August sunset wrapped the town, and split the green, shadowy masses of tree foliage, all along Washington Street, with arrows and pennants of light.

On either side were the quiet, comfortable country-town houses, each in its garden, each roofed by trees, and each completed by a driveway and a remote garage. Garden sprinklers were whirling tonight over the massed autumn flowers, and the air was damp and sweet.

Little children toddled on the lawns, their mothers, fresh and brushed and fragrant, ready for dinner, kept an eye on the street; any car might be the family car now.

Almost everyone knew Barbara Atherton and Link Mackenzie, loitering home through the sunset; for three generations to come, the gossips would talk of their affair. It was already one that was "for all the world like a book."

"Nearest thing in the world," the women would say, "that he didn't marry the Wilsons' cousin, a Mis' Scott that came down here and just about broke his heart. And while all this was going on, didn't Barb'ry Atherton up and marry a feller named Du Spain, that didn't amount to fifteen cents' worth of cat meat. And they went down to an old place he had—nobody saw much of them for awhile.

"Meanwhile, a good deal had developed that made Link Mackenzie's

father come out flatfooted against his marrying Marianne Scott—seems she was a married woman, anyway—and that all died down. And then Barry du Spain just simply and flatly deserted his wife; she had a baby girl, too, and her folks was all moved down south then, and she had to come into town and get a job.

"And didn't she find out, a few months later, that she wasn't married at all. No, the clergyman who married her was nothing but a forger, and she wasn't any more married to him than to any other man in town. And let me tell you that it didn't take her and Link Mackenzie long to make up their minds this time—they were married within a month of the whole thing coming out!"

Thrilled by their romance, and as interested in its dramatic developments as they were, all the world smiled upon Barbara and Link now. Tall and slender and more serious than she had been in the days of a few years ago, they watched her pacing at his side, and perhaps they wondered what detail of the marvelous future bent his head toward her glittering coppery head so absorbedly and chained her blue eyes to his.

A couple of schoolgirls passed them with linked arms, and not without a beaming greeting and an awed backward glance. A young father and mother passed them, wheeling a hooded perambulator. Children passed them at an Indian whirl, screaming, breathless, racing.

"Somebody was wheeling you and me along these streets, Link, not so many years ago. It seems good to be marrying and settling here where we belong."

"And we went yelping along this same sidewalk just as those kids did, once, Barberry. Do you remember the feeling when the first long spring evenings came, and we all went whooping and yelling all over town?"

"And I can remember walking along here, home from school, when I was just beginning to grow up, when the most thrilling thing in the world was to go to Bartell's for sodas," the girl mused. "Isn't life funny? The first boy who ever bought me an ice-cream soda was Barry du Spain, and I almost died of the shock. I was about fourteen, I think. It was the first time I wasn't supposed to have a dime for my own."

"Remember when Fox first came to town and we used to make fun of him?"

"Remember the awful minstrel show?"

"Gosh!" he murmured boyishly. "And in two days," he added dreamily, "you'll climb into my car beside me, and we'll be off for Del Monte! And when you come back, you'll have to turn in *my* gate, instead of my always turning in yours!"

The beautiful face paled with sheer emotion at the thought.

"Link, sometimes it seems as if the time was standing still. And then—so curiously—it'll seem as if it was just rushing, taking my breath away. Day after tomorrow!"

They turned in at the Duffy gate. The mild old mansard house looked down at them blandly, and Barbara's father, wandering about the garden

with Kate, guided the baby's staggering footsteps toward them. Barbara caught the child up in her arms, and left the two men who loved her. They watched the graceful young step with which she mounted the porch and disappeared into the dim doorway.

Inside was twilight, and a certain stuffiness, and the odors of blackberry pies and corn soup. Barbara stopped in the littered kitchen for Kate's supper tray and chatted with Mrs Duffy.

"Well, how's our bride?"

"Your bride is taking her baby upstairs to bed."

"That sounds something terrible, Barb'ry!" remonstrated Mrs Duffy. "Well, I guess you feel considerable more like a bride now than you did when you run off with Barry du Spain, three years ago!" she surmised.

"I didn't feel like a bride then, at all!" Barbara assured her. "Whereas now," she confessed, cutting a slice of bread into appetizing strips, "I feel all fluttery and laughey and cryey."

"You certainly are going to be a good-looking pair," Mrs Duffy, cascading smoking rice from its saucepan into a cullender, predicted admiringly. "You're lucky, Barb'ry. But I don't know as I'd rather have it come to anyone else sooner than you, when all's said and done!"

"Well," Barbara reminded her, in the country phrase, "I've had my share!"

"You've had troubles, when you were sick and all," Mrs Duffy, putting a small sponge cake on Kate's tray, conceded. "But you've not had what some women have, Barb'ry—don't fool yourself!" she said. "Women that have to drag along with no-account, shiftless men, drinking men, as like as not, with a baby coming every year, and no way out, and nobody to help 'em or care if their beauty gets hammered down and their teeth drop out."

"Yes, I know," Barbara said, in a small humble voice, as the other woman paused. "You're quite right! I'm lucky."

"You married a man that wasn't good to you, but Barry du Spain was a handsome feller," Mrs Duffy resumed, almost with severity, "and he was mighty attractive. You didn't have to marry him if you didn't want to. And now, three years later, when he's gone away from you—treated you badly like lots of other women's husbands—it's your luck to find that you aren't tied to him at all, and that there isn't a clergyman or a priest in the country that won't marry you to a better man, since you've found him.

"Why, you might be expecting Barry du Spain's third baby, down on that God-forsaken place, Barb'ry, and where'd you be then? You'd be the one to talk him into marrying *you*."

Barbara engineered the last of the rice and cream into Kate's expectant mouth. She lifted the baby's glass and held it patiently against Kate's vague little red lips.

"Yes, that's true! That's perfectly true. I've gotten out of my troubles much quicker than some women do," she conceded gravely. The warm cheeks wore a satiny flush. "You have to be *in* marriage," Barbara said,

"to know just how serious it is. Look at Marianne's case, and so many other cases! It was only the thousandth chance that let me out."

And she looked at the big calendar—Mackenzie & Company's yearly contribution to the kitchens and offices of Cottonwood. Today was Tuesday. Tomorrow would be the eve of her wedding day. Thursday she would be Mrs Thomas Lincoln Mackenzie, Junior.

Her wedding costume had come; it was tied with white tape, under layers and layers of silky tissue paper in a big box. A little rough white silk skirt with a flare, a long tailored white coat, and a delicate embroidered waist, with a rich frill spilling itself down the front. A small white hat in a little round box of its own, with a beautiful white owl spread over it trimly and closely, wrinkly white gloves, white stockings, white slippers, pumps with buckles, and to complete the whole, one of Link's gifts: the great furry, sprawling, soft, deep-furred yellow fox skin, whose tawny tones would match Barbara's own bright hair.

She had wanted white for her wedding; Amy had insisted on white. But not a train, not a veil, for the woman who had had so strange a marital experience only a few years ago. Barbara had compromised on the thick, creamy, Oriental silk of the suit, and the little hat.

And tonight, when she had looked her fill at hat and shoes and frilled immaculate waist, she and Link carried the boxes over to Amy's house; the wedding was to be there, and Amy must be given a chance to exult and exclaim beforehand.

They sat about Ward's table gossiping happily; more presents had come in. Link's father was sending more palms. Mrs Poett had said they could have all her phlox, masses and masses of it, pale pink and white and delicate blue. The hydrangeas had come, they were in buckets in the garage.

Something else had come. Barbara stretched a slim brown hand toward her sister. Amy gasped, catching in her own hand the fingers that carried the brilliant white stone between two guardian green ones.

"Mortification has set in!" Ward diagnosed; "two of 'em have spoiled!"

They all laughed shakily, protestingly. Link's sister Lucy and her husband had joined them now. The evening had turned chilly, and Ward had all the new householder's satisfaction in fussing with an open fire.

"And, Amy, all his mother's beautiful set—onyx and big pearls," Barbara said in an undertone; "the chain is simply magnificent, old-fashioned gold rope. And the ring!"

"Mother had several sets," Lucy Mackenzie Barnard said. "Dad gave me her amethysts, and Margaret is to have some lovely odd things—all her diamonds. But my father gave my mother the onyx with the pearls, and she always said they were for Link's wife. You know," Lucy added cautiously, behind her brother's back, "you can have them reset, after awhile."

"Oh, but I love them as they are!" Barbara protested. And she got

them and put them all on: chain and locket, ring and bracelets, pagoda earrings and brooch. Each oval of onyx was set with a pansy of five round pearls and edged with larger pearls.

"Well, you really could wear them exactly as they are—they're stunning," Lucy conceded. "We had all ours broken up, but that black and pearl suits you, Barbara. Doesn't it, Otis?"

They all thought it did. Barbara, looking up in all the new dignity of her heavy jewelry, caught Link's adoring, steady gaze, caught the look in his eyes that made her own eyes lower and her color creep up. Not tomorrow night, but the night after that, she and Link would be down at Del Monte.

She had never been there. She visualized pines and palms, and a rambling old wooden hotel beside the sea. Mrs Mackenzie, unpacking beautiful, delicate new things from a new suitcase. The Mackenzies going down to a hotel dinner, taking the seventeen-mile drive in their car. Link, always with her, Link a part of her life as long as they both should live. Her frocks made to please this square-built, sunburned man who was smiling at her, her room his room, her name his name.

Her children the little Mackenzies—the most fortunate children in town.

"What are you smiling at?" Link asked her.

"Just thinking. I'll tell you later!"

"Barbara, if the wedding is four o'clock Thursday, what can you do all day? You can't go out, and you'll get as nervous as a witch loafing around here."

"Link and I could take a drive, maybe."

"Link and you couldn't! Haven't you any sense of delicacy?" This was Ward, who liked his wife's sister immensely and loved to make her flush.

"I'll be bustin' to have a hand in everything," Lucy said, "and I'll come over about noon."

"Come over to lunch, Lucy," Amy suggested. "We'll probably have scrambled eggs in the kitchen, for the dining room will be full of plates and glasses."

"Glasses!" said Ward, struck. "Remind me of glasses!"

"The wedding will be at four," Amy, full of affairs, resumed happily. "We'll have only sandwiches, cake, coffee, and ginger ale and tea."

"How many are you asking, Amy?" This was Otis Barnard.

"About a hundred, I guess." Amy gave an excited giggle.

"I'll bet it's more," Link assured her nervously.

"The list is a hundred and three. But there are a few more we have to telephone to."

"Barbara, you better begin to dress at three," decided Lucy.

"Oh, heavens! I think I'll go over to your house and play croquet until quarter of four!"

"To *whose* house?"

Her April color flamed and faded, she laughed apologetically, looking toward Link for the glance that never failed her.

"To *our* house," she amended. "Lucy, would you like to see my suit and the hat?"

Lucy rose with alacrity.

"*Would* I? What's Kate going to wear?"

"Kate? Oh, the darling, she has a new romper—white, with a butterfly on it. She's adorable in it."

"She's really nicest of all in her pajamas," said Link, grinning.

"A nice stepfather you'll make!" Ward, from his proud six months of parenthood, said scornfully.

The women went upstairs in an eagerly murmuring group. They could be heard laughing. When they came down, there were tears on Amy's lashes, and Barbara's beautiful eyes wore a mystified look; she was even a little pale.

"She is *the* most gorgeous thing in all that white," Lucy said. "Amy began to cry when we got her all into it! I'm mad about it."

"She looks gorgeous to me in anything," Link said mildly, from the arm of Barbara's chair.

They quite openly laced fingers.

"Oh, this old rag!" Barbara protested, looking down on the dark blue swiss.

"These girls who marry money get their heads completely turned." Fox Madison, who was to be one of the ushers, and who had drifted in while the bride-to-be and her attendants were upstairs, said regretfully.

Barbara laughed then. But later, when the visitors had gone home, and Lucy was upstairs giving her baby his eleven o'clock bottle, when Ward had run over to the hospital for a late report on some surgical case, and when she and Link had their usual precious last few minutes alone, by the dying fire, she reverted to the subject.

"You know when you asked me what I was smiling at, Link?"

"I remember. You said you would tell me later."

"Well, I was just wondering—" her head was on his shoulder, their fingers were together again, the beautiful slender body rested against him, as she shared his big chair, his arm about her—"I was just wondering, if you were poor, if we wouldn't be quite as happy," she said. "You know, Link," added Barbara, moving her head to give him a glimpse of her eyes and looking back at the fire again, "I've never minded poverty! I loved contriving and fussing, in the little house in Las Haciendas for Dad and Amy. I like emergencies and makeshifts—really I do. If you had to go to Alaska tomorrow, and we had to live on a hundred dollars a month, I could do it! I'd be so happy, doing it!"

"I believe you, Barberry," he said, stirred.

Again she flashed upon him the blue, blue eyes that were misted now with her tears.

"You're my *life,* my darling," she said, in a low tone. "I couldn't live vithout you!"

It was so rare in her, the complete confession, that he tried to preserve his exquisite minute while he might.

"I don't suppose any man, no matter how much he loves her, ought o have a woman like you," Link said boyishly and bashfully, and Barbara laughed.

"Thursday," she said presently, reverting to the wedding plans, "Kate nd I will come over here, in the morning, unless we occupy the brand-iew spare room tomorrow night. You'll send somebody over, any time during the morning, for my suitcase?—and then they can't tie a lot of vhite ribbon to it, or charge it with rice, or get off any other little pleasantry."

"What I thought I'd do," Link explained, "is come over here in the big car and park it in Battle Street with two empty suitcases in it. If they're going to get funny, that will take them off the trail. Then I'll have Collins or somebody bring over the roadster at the last minute, and wait at the back gate. We can come out the side door, start for the big car, double, and be off before they can do more than brain us with a couple of old shoes."

Her laugh broke joyously.

"I suppose other people, when they get married, have as much fun and excitement out of it, but it's hard to believe," she mused.

"I was thinking that. Brides and grooms always get sentimental and gushy when they talk about it, but somehow you don't realize it, when you're on the outside. We can stop the car, when we get a few miles out of town," Link resumed, "and brush off rice and get things straightened out."

She smiled, thinking of it. When the roadster carried them out into the brown, flat, hazy autumn twilight, she would be Barbara Mackenzie, going to Del Monte with her husband. In less than two days!

"Look," he said, fumbling for a telegram. Barbara read it as he flattened it with his big right hand, his left arm still employed in a firm grip of her shoulders. It was from the proprietor of the hotel: Mr Mackenzie's reservations for Thursday night would be duly made.

"You think of everything!" Barbara commented. "Sometimes I think you are going to take pretty good care of me."

"It won't be my fault if I don't," Link assured her seriously.

"And it won't be my fault if you are not the happiest man in the world." But she did not say this aloud, this was only a part of the fervent thoughts, the half-fearful and all-happy prayers that absorbed her during these last days. He should be happy, she promised her own soul. He should have a wife whose one prayer should be always to grow more and more simple and pure and loving, more and more anxious to make his life and his home perfect in their way.

There would be children in the big white brick house, Christmas

parties and holiday picnics, there would be gentleness and charity and goodness. And some day, when they were old, and the dim tragedy of Barbara's first marriage only a dream, and little Kate a wife and mother in her turn, Link would say to his sons and daughters: "You can't be any happier than your mother and I have been for forty—for fifty years."

Slowly, yet the clock's hands did move, and it was the morning of her wedding eve; it was noontime, and with the clear droning of the factory whistles Link had come to find her, under the yellowing maple leaves in the side yard, at Amy's house.

"Link, Miss Wilcox from the school wants to play a little music when Dad and I come downstairs tomorrow. Amy nearly had a fit; she says she'll play 'The Rosary' or 'Oh, Promise Me,' or something, and get everyone giggling. But she's such a nice old thing, and so thrilled! Her beau went to Manila and died of fever, and she's romantic, you know. Do you care?"

"I don't care if she plays 'Red Hot Mamma,' dearest."

"Well, you're a darling! And listen, Link, your sisters and maybe your father, and Mrs Duffy and Amy and Ward and I are all going to early church tomorrow. You'll come, too?"

"You mean you really are!" His burned, hard, attractive face reddened with pleasure.

"I mean I really are!"

"Barbara, that means a lot to me."

"Well, I'm glad. My father doesn't mind. He said mildly that my grandfather had given the ground for St Rita's Cemetery, and he expected that he'd turn in it, when he knew. But that was mere humor."

"Let's remember today," Link said. "I don't believe people are often as happy as this!"

She half closed her eyes, smiled quizzically.

"And tomorrow'll have its points, too," she reminded him.

"Barbara!" Amy called from the house, "Mrs Green is on the telephone, and she can't come tomorrow, and she wants to speak to you! Hello, Link," said Amy, following her voice out to the side yard, as Barbara fled within, "isn't this simply bedlam? I hope we won't have another wedding until Kate here marries Lucy's Otis! Are you coming in?"

"I thought maybe you and Barbara would sneak downtown with me and have lunch at the 'Yellow Cream Pitcher.' We can sit in those little alcoves there, and nobody'll see us. Maybe we could catch Ward."

"I think it would be grand!" responded Amy, with the enthusiasm of the hostess who discovers at a ticklish noontime that her guests are to be assets rather than liabilities. Wedding preparations had now reached the point when Amy's one desire was to appear in the kitchen doorway, and say to her new and still highly unsettled cook: "We won't be here for lunch—dinner—breakfast!"

CHAPTER XXIII

It was on this last afternoon that Barbara and Link walked through the splendid rooms of the old home that was to be their new one; looked through the gracious, white-paneled doorways, crossed the wide polished floors to look down through the freshly cleaned window panes into the garden.

Their own quarters were finished now, or almost finished. Some of the curtains were still folded, and waiting, with brass hooks and rods, on tables or chairs. The beds were not made; but upon the deep new mattresses were folded the blankets and linen. There were details of picture-hanging and the placing of chairs still to manage; even while they strolled, enchanted, through the whole domain that was scented with paint, varnish, and the new smell of rugs and hangings, crates were being unpacked in the barn, and Barbara's desk and Link's dresser were carried upstairs and carefully placed in their destined corners.

Ready for the desk was her engraved stationery, boxes and boxes of it, her heavy crystal inkwell and marbled trays and bowls. The closets looked deliciously large and bright and empty; certain fascinating boxes had been placed within them. "I can't remember half the things we've bought!" Barbara said, in a perfect whirl of confusing and happy impressions.

"We'll take our time opening them all up!" Link assured her; "one of those Shreve boxes might be the little lamps—or it might be those two birds you took such a fancy to in Chinatown."

It was on this occasion that he suddenly diverted the conversation to the almost-forgotten ranch.

"Barbara, do you remember that, while you were ill, you asked me to go down to the old hacienda, and look about for letters and deeds and things?"

"Perfectly." But she never quite liked to be reminded of the ranch.

"You remember that Barry had told you that he was giving you the place? Was that before or after you were married?"

"I'm not sure. Afterward, I think. It was just around that time. And finally he *did* give me a deed. Didn't you find the deed?"

"Yes. It was made out to Barbara Atherton, though. So that it is valid."

"Even though I'm not Barbara du Spain!" she mused, struck. "I suppose he either arranged it before we were married, or else was in one of his absent-minded moods, later. It isn't—the ranch isn't worth much, is it, Link? It's mortgaged, you know, to the hilt. That property never will be worth anything."

"I'm not so sure," Link said, with the look that Barbara secretly characterized as his "business face," and secretly admired. "It won't

be for some time. But Miller and I have had a little scheme about it for almost a year. As a matter of fact, we had it in mind when we went down there, Christmas Eve. We don't want to make a mushroom development of the place, like some of these other places, but we both do feel, and my father feels, too, that it might make a very fine investment. To lay out roads, put sewerage and water in——

"It would have to go slowly, there'd never be anything sensational about it. But it would mean a little money trickling in for Kate, year after year. By the time she was a young lady, it'd be a good nest egg.

"Miller is working on a proposition to make you now; you to preserve a certain interest in the whole thing, we to develop it, and the profits, if there are any, to go to Kate."

"Oh, Link, Link—this is a put-up job!"

"Put-up job nothing; it's a straight business deal. And you might easily do better, if the southern end of town begins to develop. But, anyway, there's a possibility there. We'd preserve the hacienda, make it into an inn, some day——"

"You're the best man in the world, I think. You're so much nearer her—nearer Kate—than her own father!" Barbara presently said in an undertone. And in the room that was so soon to be their study and own private upstairs sitting room and library, she put her two hands on his broad shoulders and raised her face to give him one of her rare kisses.

The clock's hands moved on; it was four o'clock, on the wedding eve, it was five o'clock. Link was to dine with his father and sisters tonight, Barbara and Kate would be at Amy's. After supper, she wouldn't see Link, she would be writing notes of thanks for presents; it would be a quiet evening, she would go early to bed.

Dusk was at half-past six tonight; Barbara paid her father, who was in bed with a cold, a daughterly visit, loitered through the Duffy kitchen with a reminder to her good friend and landlady that he was unattended, and left the house by the side gate, to walk the two short blocks to Amy's house. Kate was already there.

A man was standing at the gate, a tall man—waiting for a girl, perhaps. Barbara came near him, glanced at him directly in the half light.

And then she saw that it was Barry, looking at her with the old look she knew so well, the doubtful, timid, little-boy look she had seen upon his face after a score of meaningless quarrels, a score of times.

Her heart stood still, and her mouth grew dry. She looked at him for a long minute, quite unable to think at all, much less to speak.

He was shabby and looked badly groomed. But he was still beautiful, the dark eyes burning in his white face, the remembered wing of black hair loosened across his low forehead.

"Barbara," he said, in a hoarse voice broken a little with an awkward laugh, "I've come back. I'm sorry!"

The sickening significance, the utter horrifying unexpectedness of it, caused her a wave of something actually like nausea. She trembled and

stared at him blankly, locking the fingers of both hands together and pressing them over her plunging heart.

"Barry!" she whispered. No voice would come. She put one hand behind her and steadied herself against the picket fence.

She had kissed this man, her hand had caressed that wave of dark disordered hair, she had slept through winter nights, through hundreds of nights, with his big arm about her. In agony and weakness and fright, she had borne him a child.

And now he was nothing to her, nothing more than any other casual passer-by on this dim autumn sidewalk, under these gaunt, thinning trees. Tomorrow she was to marry another man.

"I just got in on the train; I've not seen anyone!" Barry said. "Where are you going? May I walk with you?"

Not knowing where she went, or what she said, she faced about, and they walked slowly along together. A woman, passing, gave Barbara a smile, and the man a sharp look. She turned, Barbara could hear her ejaculated "For the land's sake!" as she went on her way.

Now what—now what—now what? Barbara's thought ran confusedly. What was she to do? What would happen now? Were they all crazy that they had gone on placidly planning her wedding, while this man, who was her husband, walked the earth?

"I got to San Francisco yesterday, and the first thing Schofield showed me was an old paper with something in it about our marriage not being legal. Did you see it?"

The remembered voice, the familiar intonations! Barbara could not speak. She walked along silently, feeling dizzy and sick.

"Do you mean you are really so angry at me, Barbara?" he said. And they might have parted yesterday in the old hacienda; it might have been only yesterday that they had quarreled, and Barry had flung himself away from her, to walk the wet flat fields above the sea, and to return penitent and plead for her forgiveness once again.

"It isn't that at all, Barry," she managed to say faintly. The nightmare continued; the sound of her own voice did not waken her as it might have done. She was still walking with Barry du Spain, past the Wilsons' garden fence, long and dim and ghostly white, stretching away into a perspective of scalloped poles, in the twilight.

In the Mackenzie house, only a square away in Link's room, standing beside his own packed bag, was her suitcase with the new clothes in it, the silk pajamas that extravagant Amy had given her, the tortoise-shell mirror and brushes.

And in Amy's house, fragrant and soft and white on its hanger, was her wedding suit, and above it, in layers of tissue, her white hat—waiting like the ranked glasses in the dining room, and the softly drooping flowers in the drawing room, and the little white romper with the butterfly on it—for tomorrow.

Tomorrow, when more than a hundred affectionate folk would stream

along the sidewalk, and turn in at Dr Ward Duffy's gate, and come into Amy's house to see Barbara Atherton happily married.

Would this man, whose wife she had in fact been, whose child she had borne, be among them? A wild hysterical impulse toward laughter shook her, and Barbara realized that she must summon all the strength and self-control she might, and meet the situation with the supreme courageous effort of her life.

"Barbara," he asked anxiously, "is it true?"

She could actually see the bland old white-painted brick walls of the Mackenzie house. She was to have been mistress of that splendid old tree-bowered place tomorrow. Why were she and Barry du Spain wandering like disembodied spirits through the somber autumn dusk instead?

The night would be cold. Barbara tried to think, as a sad little breeze rustled yellow leaves high over their heads, and the Wilsons' windmill creaked and splashed in the soft evening gloom. Motor cars were carrying lights, now, and in the big houses of Cottonwood's most aristocratic district square windows shone suddenly; upstairs windows unshaded, downstairs windows against whose revelations maids drew down the shades.

"I think we had better go to Amy's," the girl said slowly.

"Amy's? Are Amy and Ward back?"

"Oh, yes. He came up on Christmas Eve, a day or two after you went away, Barry, and he's sharing Dr Bonner's practice. Dr Bonner hasn't been well. Amy and Ward have a little boy, and Lucy Mackenzie has another baby, and Margaret's going to marry a man from Connecticut she met when she was at school."

Not that it mattered, the town gossip, but it was something to say. She spoke apathetically, vaguely, hardly thinking of what she said.

"Ward bought the old Rogers place; they've had it all fixed over, and they've been boarding with his mother and father—she keeps boarders now, the old man hasn't done anything for some time. And Kate and Dad and I have been there, too."

"Kate!" Barry said, "she's nearly two. I've thought of her every day —every hour!—since I went away, and of you, too."

Barbara's throat felt thick and dry; she was utterly weary.

"You don't look very well, Barry."

"Oh, I've been sick!" he said eagerly, pathetically.

"What brought you—" she was so tired—"what brought you back to California?"

He stopped. In the dusk, she could feel rather than see his reproachful stare.

"Why, I was always coming back! I've only been gone eight months!"

Barbara felt weak and chilled.

"But, Barry—so much has happened!"

There was a moment's silence. Then he said:

"Why aren't you married to me? That's what I can't understand. You *re* married to me!"

"No, it was no marriage. The man who married us wasn't really a lergyman at all."

"Barberry, who said so?"

"Why, everyone, Barry—and the people he married had to have it lone all over again!"

"What of it!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Have the old town biddies een making capital out of it?"

It was almost dark now. She was still walking in a nightmare. This vas Barry—Barry come back again.

"Have you and the baby gone back to the hacienda?"

"No, Barry—Link Mackenzie and I are to be married tomorrow."

It was said. There was a dead silence. She could not see his face in he gloom.

"What are you talking about?" he presently asked bewilderedly.

She knew that elaborate, gentle surprise.

"I know you won't stay here—I know you won't make it hard for me," Barbara said.

Another silence. Then suddenly and harshly he said:

"Oh, my *God*—I don't believe it!"

"It's true, Barry. If you had come here at this time tomorrow, it vould have been all over."

"I would have followed you, wherever you went," Barry said, after moment, in a low tense voice, "and shot him down like a dog! I don't blame you, I treated you terribly, *terribly,* and he's rich, and he can play he friend—I know Link Mackenzie! Of course, it would impress you. But he can dam' well keep his hands off you!"

She knew the tone, half earnest, half sheer drama.

"You're talking foolishly," he answered, in an unexpectedly gentle, letermined tone. "I know just how wrong I've been——" he was beginning, when her tired voice arrested him.

"Come to Amy's. This is no place to talk."

They turned in the side gate; walked up the steps, and Barry followed Barbara into the lamplighted, comfortable sitting room.

Ward was in a chair by the fire, with his baby in his arms, Amy was pposite him, sewing. Both Amy and Ward blinked at the shadows that oftly wrapped the doorway, trying to see who the tall man was, bent a ittle and shabby, following Barbara in.

"Amy," Barbara said, in a light, frightened voice, "it's Barry!"

Amy was instantly on her feet, her mild little face flushed, her mild ones raised to sharpness.

"Barry du Spain can't come into my house!" she said flatly.

Ward, his honest simple face also turning dark red, remained seated, he baby's downy little bobbing head just under his chin, his eyeglassed ook focused anxiously on Amy.

"Barry didn't know I was to be married tomorrow, Ward," Barbara explained quickly. And it sickened Amy to hear the old conciliatory note, the explaining note, in her voice again.

"That has nothing to do with it," Ward contributed slowly, in a silence.

"I want to talk with her," Barry pleaded. He stood, down-at-heel and gentle and forlorn, in the lamplight and firelight. "I'm going away," he said. "I just want to talk with Barberry Bush."

He had put her old love name in to make it pathetic, Barbara thought, steeled against the effect his voice, his beauty, his charm had always held for her. She knew them too well!

"I can't see what you can have to say to her, Barry," Amy said sternly, after a pause.

Barry crossed to the fire and sat down. And they saw that there was gray in the dark rich hair above his temples, and that in every way he seemed a much older man than the poetic, graceful boy who had left Cottonwood almost a year ago.

They all sat down; it was like Barry's old power over everyone with whom he came in contact that this first point was in his favor. And immediately circumstances began to work for him, to shelter him, as they always had.

The baby's nurse came down, to carry the baby away, and following her, with an enormous and substantial tea tray, came the waitress who had been impressed into special service for tomorrow's great occasion, and who had been counting napkins and rubbing floors all day.

It appeared that, because of a late, hearty lunch, and because of the domestic excitement, the family was to have sandwiches and tea instead of supper tonight. Barbara had forgotten the arrangement, but it made it simply impossible not to include Barry in the meal, unless he were to be antagonized, infuriated, and sent forth into the night an enemy.

And that even the enraged and unfriendly Amy was shrewd and swift enough to appreciate this, was evinced by the fact that it was Amy's voice that asked: "You'll have tea, Barry?"

"Oh, Amy!" he answered quickly, humbly, "I'm starving!"

That was Barry's way, too. That would win the heart of the housewife, of the young woman who had a boy child of her own, upstairs, as could nothing else.

The sandwiches were substantial, oozing sustaining wedges of egg and tomato and lettuce. Barry fell upon them ravenously; Ward kept him company. But Amy, nervous and suspicious, could only nibble, and although Barbara drank her tea gratefully and smiled courageously at her sister every time Amy's anxious glance reached her, she could not eat.

When Barry had finished, he put away his plate and flung his crumpled napkin on the tray. His color was better now; he looked less tired and spent and much more like his old self as, sinking forward in his chair and linking his fingers, he fixed his dark and troubled gaze upon Barbara.

"Barbara, what did I do?"

She had sunk back into her own big chair, slender and frightened and more beautiful in her pallor, with the blue eyes burning beneath the fire of her blazing hair, than any one of these three had ever seen her before.

"Barry, it's too late to discuss that!" she answered nervously. "Let's not go into it. I've forgiven you long ago. We never were married—you knew that? It's all over, and the only thing for us to do is forget it."

His brow contracted a trifle; he did not shift his steady gaze.

"I heard," he said patiently, as one who determines to unravel a mystery at any cost, "that that fellow who married us was not a clergyman."

"Exactly!" Amy contributed on a note of triumph.

"Is that true?" Barry asked bewilderedly, turning to Ward.

"Yes, absolutely!"

"He must have married other persons?" Barry pursued.

"He did. The little Prince girl, for one. They've all been remarried," Ward explained.

"There had to be formal annulments and remarriages," Barbara added faintly.

"Did they arrest him?" Barry demanded, piecing it all together with a judicial air.

"They've arrested him on other charges—forgery, I don't know what."

"I should think so!" Barry ejaculated, and appeared to muse.

The other three eyed him in silence, all three afraid of what he might say next.

He looked humbly at Barbara.

"I only got the news two days ago. I was in San Francisco, and some one had sent Schofield a Cottonwood paper," he explained. "I thought—of course, you and I would be married again, right away."

Barbara spoke slowly, determinedly. She must be the one to say this, no one could say it for her.

"Barry, what reason had I to suppose that what I did or didn't do was of any interest to you?"

It was a broadside, and he weakened under it, and still sitting forward in his low chair, he turned his eyes toward the fire and faintly shrugged.

"I left you last December—this is August," he presently said. "All that time I've been trying—you don't have to believe it—but I've been trying to make good, for you and the baby. I suppose I've been stupid about it—God knows I'm an ass! But I always thought—" he paused, blinking, and pressing his big palms tightly together—"I've always sorter thought you'd stand by me, Barbara!" he faltered, smiling shamefacedly like a boy, and giving her a quick glance before sending his gaze back to the fire.

Her answer came quick and hurt. Amy realized with a sort of terror that the thing was taking the shape of an affair debatable.

"*You* didn't stand by *me!*"

"No, I know I didn't. You were terribly ill; Joe Dodge told me that. But I didn't know that until it was all over—I couldn't understand it,

I thought Ward and Amy were down in Los Angeles. It was all confusion to me, I hadn't a cent, I knew there was no use in my coming back——"

"I suppose you didn't know that a tramp got down there, and frightened her almost to death, and that she almost died?" Ward asked, thinking in his own kindly soul that he was being mercilessly stern. But Amy, perceiving that this attitude of argument was the one thing for which Barry had hoped, felt a most unwonted sensation of impatience and anger.

Barry sent a look of genuine consternation about the circle.

"A tramp!" he ejaculated.

Barbara sat back in her chair. In the warm firelight her cheeks were the color of ivory; her heavy dark lashes were lowered, and between the closed lids two tears slipped, while they watched her.

"Barry," Amy began, goaded to desperation by the thought that this was actually the wedding eve, and that further temporizing would perhaps cost Barbara her life's happiness. "It's too late now to argue and discuss. Whatever case you can make out for yourself, this whole town doesn't agree with you. This whole town," Amy went on, beginning to cry, but speaking angrily and determinedly through the tears she dashed away, "thinks you treated Barbara like a *skunk*. She was deathly ill; she almost died! She had to come back to life deeply in debt, with no home and no money and no one to help her. She got her old job at the school——"

"I thought your father cleared everything up!" Barry interrupted suddenly.

"Trust him to have found that out!" Amy said later, scornfully, to Ward.

Now she only said, with a voice whose mollified notes showed the cost of the angry overstatement:

"Well, if he did, *you* didn't help!"

Strangely, except that it always happened where Barry was concerned, their position seemed to have been appreciably weakened and his strengthened by the last few phrases.

"Barbara," he said gently, "I'm sorry about the tramp."

She opened her eyes, shrugged faintly in her turn.

"Oh, that's all right—Link happened to be coming down to the ranch," she said. "And he brought Kate and me back!"

"Just his luck, to be able to do what I failed to do for you!" Barry commented in an undertone, as if he were thinking aloud.

Suddenly he looked up, and his eyes found each one of them in turn. Surprisedly, simply, he faced Ward's serious and troubled face, Amy's scornful glance, Barbara's blue, accusing, weary eyes.

"Why, but—but the fact that the man wasn't really a clergyman certainly doesn't make us any the less man and wife, does it?" he asked, with his baffling air of honesty and amazement.

"It makes you absolutely nothing to each other," Amy answered, in a silence.

"Nonsense!" said Barry sharply. "What about Kate?"

"You're the one," Barbara contributed in a tone she made dispassionate, "you're the one who used always to say that that very thing didn't matter—that to be born of parents who didn't love each other was the only real illegitimacy."

Barry stared at her, stupefied.

"But—but I always have loved you and always will!" he protested, after a pause. "You know that! There's never been anyone else in the world for me."

Barbara smiled with infinite sadness, and Amy noticed how changed she was, in just this one short year, from the old gay Barbara; what spiritual values lay in the deep shadows about her blue eyes, and the chiseling of her tender, wise, beautiful mouth.

"Oh, no, Barry," Barbara said, unconvinced, and shaking her head. "You mustn't tell *me* that!"

The rebuke lingered in the air; Amy's eyes watered, and she bit her lip. Ward shot the other man a challenging and a triumphant glance. And they saw Barry's color change.

Barbara alone seemed quite herself, mistress of voice and manner. She twisted the beautiful green and white glitter of her engagement ring, and watched it, as they talked.

"I went away to succeed for you!" Barry exclaimed, looking about for sympathy. "Amy," he pleaded, "Ward—tell her that the actual wedding ceremony didn't matter—that she and I are just as much man and wife as if the whole college of bishops had married us! Why, we've a child. Why, I left her less than a year ago, to try to make a living for us all! You know that, Barberry."

Barbara, bowing her head forward, pressed all ten finger-tips to her forehead, pushed them up and down. When she took her hands away her hair was disheveled and her eyes tortured.

But she did not speak. It was Ward who presently spoke quickly and impatiently, rising from his chair, and going to the fireplace to stand, shoving tobacco into his pipe, staring down at the other three.

"Barry, there's no sense in this—there's no justice!" he burst out. "For God's sake, man, try to realize that she treated you far, far better than you ever deserved to be treated. She stuck it out, down there at the ranch, long after ninety-nine women out of a hundred would have quit. She was ill, she hadn't a cent, still she hadn't an ugly word to say about you. You didn't write for——"

"Because I had nothing but bad news to write!" Barry interpolated hotly, as Ward, quite unconscious of what he did, stopped to hold a match to the bowl and pull on his pipe.

"Yes, I know. But a wife has a right to know even that! And even then," Ward went on, shaping his case with an eloquence that seemed

perfectly astonishing to Amy, as she breathlessly listened. "Even then," he said, "when everyone in town—or at least when her whole family was trying to persuade her to divorce you—she wouldn't, on Kate's account. No, she'd married you, and that was all there was about it, and if you didn't succeed in New York, you'd probably come back here, and she'd wait for you. She took her old job——"

"My God, Ward!" Barry exclaimed, looking up haggardly from between the two long hands that had been pressed against his fallen head, "don't rub it in! It's all true! But haven't wonderful women always been forgiving rotters like me—always been taking them back, giving them another trial? That's all I ask. I want a trial! I want to show her," Barry rushed out, beginning to shake with sobs, "that I *do* love my wife, that I can take care of her and my baby, that I've learned the bitterest lesson a man ever learned in this life."

Amy's eyes were brimming with tears of most unwilling sympathy. Even Ward seemed shaken, and looked, irresolute and scowling, at his wife, trying to read her feeling. But Barbara was unmoved.

"Barry," she said calmly, her quiet voice cutting across his high-keyed, emotional utterances with an effect instantly stilling, "you have no right to come here and take this stand. I *did* love you, or I thought I did; I did fight to make our marriage a success. You were the one who sickened of it——"

"Never!" Barry gasped passionately, his dark head again fallen almost to the level of his knees, and clasped in his long white fingers shaking violently with the denial. "Never!"

"You left me without a penny," Barbara went on inflexibly, "when I was not well and had a baby to care for and another coming——"

"My God, my God," Barry burst forth, beside himself with despair and excitement, "I didn't *have* a penny! *You* knew that! Did I ever try to keep a cent back from you? I worried myself sick, I walked into town in shabby shoes and gambled, all to get enough to keep our souls and bodies together! And finally—finally, when I had to watch you growing absolutely sick over money, I made the break. I told you—I wrote you—that I'd be back. And now that I'm back," he went on, suddenly beginning to sob bitterly, his voice cracked and deep with agony, "the news that meets me is that we are not married at all, and that you want to kick me out—to forbid me to see my baby girl again—to marry Link Mackenzie!"

There was a long, terrible silence in the room. The other three were young, after all, inexperienced, and they were affected in spite of themselves. Try as she would, Amy could not keep her lip curled contemptuously, or her eyes dry.

Ward shifted feet, cleared his throat, looked dubiously at Barbara, dubiously at Amy, looked back closely and attentively at his smoking pipe.

Barbara remained motionless, her hands linked lightly before her, her

body leaning a little forward in the low chair, her eyes on the fire. She wore a soft and shabby gown of dark blue corduroy, a dress she had often worn in the old days, before her marriage. There was a broad linen collar at her throat; her slender body, outlined in the rich luster of the folds of velvet, looked young and childish in the shadows of the big chair. The sheer beauty of her absorbed face, her brows lightly drawn, her under lip caught, in her own old fashion, between her teeth, and her beautiful, black-lashed eyes, wise and sad and brooding, made her seem, to Amy's fancy at least, and perhaps to Barry's, the tragic and exquisite central figure of some thrilling drama. Her narrowed eyes wore a quizzical look, there were moments when a tremor touched her closed lips, as if she might almost have laughed. And the clear skin, that had paled to her first emotion, wore the satin flush, the slight frown, of a child's face, as if she were thinking stubbornly, determinedly, like a baffled child.

But the beautiful laced fingers were a woman's, and the self-control, the temperance every line of face and figure betrayed could have belonged to no girl.

Outside, the autumn wind whined and sang softly, leaves rustled, and an occasional motor car honked its way down the street. But the comfortable, homely sitting room was utterly still; lighted with lamp and firelight, carpeted, furnished with books and chairs and the pleasant litter of leisure hours. With the curtains drawn and the door closed, they four might have been in a ship's cabin, moving lost and abandoned through a trackless sea.

"Do you think—you two, Ward and Amy," Barry exclaimed, after the long silence in which he was perfectly able to estimate the effect he had made, "do you think I'll give her up?"

Again Ward cleared his throat; when he spoke, it was in a perfectly reasonable tone.

"It isn't a question of your giving her up, Barry. You haven't any claim on her. It's more as if you and Barbara," Ward floundered, conscious that his eloquence had suddenly deserted him, "it's more as if you and Barbara had been engaged—and you had gone away, and she had become engaged to another man, that's all!"

"No claim!" Barry echoed, "except that she was my wife, and that we have a child! Why, suppose one of the witnesses of a contract is proved to be a cheater—or a liar—or not fit to testify to anything," he went on, with the fatal readiness of argument Barbara knew so well, "does that make *honorable* people——"

"Oh, Barry, don't—don't!" Barbara pleaded, in a sort of weariness of despair. "It's all such a waste of breath."

"You don't think," Amy interpolated sharply, "you *can't* think, that Barbara is going to consider your marriage valid."

"No, but surely the only honorable thing is for us to make it so!" he countered instantly.

Again Barbara smiled, her nervous, tired smile, and again she slowly and gently shook her head, without speaking.

"Ward says I have no claim on you," he said patiently, his anger suddenly cooling, "Do you believe that?"

"It is true," Barbara answered simply.

"True! When I have a child that is your child!"

"I don't think," Amy said disapprovingly, rising, as Barbara did not answer, "that we get anywhere by this kind of talk. I want to ask you, Barry, not to worry Barbara any more tonight. Tomorrow—we can talk tomorrow!"

"Just a minute," Barry delayed her, with a gesture of his hand. "I married Barbara in all good faith, three years ago. I went away, as many a man has to do, to follow up a business opening, and I left her a note, saying that I would be back as soon as I could. What more could I do? What didn't I do?"

The three others exchanged glances. Barbara was on her feet now, she looked exhausted and white, and her eyes were heavy and apathetic.

"Nothing!" she said lifelessly and indifferently, "nothing, of course! You did everything."

Instantly they had returned to their old tone of controversy. Barry, watching her, flushed resentfully. It had been her old custom to concede him everything, to shame him by her very excess of agreement. Amy and Ward looked at each other indignantly, amazedly, but Barry knew the point was Barbara's.

"I don't mean that. Everything was against me," he said sulkily. "It was hard on me, and it was harder on you—I see that. But we aren't the only young people who've had things hard."

The girl flung up her head as if she were suffocating, her restless eyes moved here and there inconsequently, she would not meet his look.

"My dear Barry," she said breathlessly, lightly, with a little miserable laugh that held no mirth. "We can't go on this way. Whosever fault it was—it's over. I don't want to talk about it—I *won't* talk about it! You've arrived here the very day before my marriage. Please imagine that you arrived instead on the day after it, and that it's too late. I'm extremely tired," Barbara finished, blinking as she turned toward Amy, and speaking nervously, as she struggled with an inopportune tendency to tears, "I'm going upstairs. Amy——?"

"Yes, I'll come with you!" Amy answered quickly, with a dagger look for Barry, whom she had never liked.

Barry watched them moodily, almost menacingly, his handsome head slightly drooped forward, his hands in the side pockets of his shabby coat.

"Is my little girl upstairs?" he asked, jerking his head backward.

"She and I came over tonight from Mrs Duffy's," Barbara answered. And Amy saw the terror that invaded her heart as if it had been a tangible thing, and saw the color ebb from her face until it looked gray.

"May I see her, Barbara?" Barry asked humbly.

She hesitated, glanced irresolutely at Amy, cleared her throat.

"Why—of course."

"Tomorrow?"

Her miserable eyes met his fairly.

"I should think so."

Barry seemed irresolute in turn.

"You and Link—" he began incredulously—"tomorrow?" he asked. "Does everyone know it?"

"Everyone!" Barbara answered faintly.

The man she had thought her husband for two stormy years flushed nervously, spoke with a boyish sort of awkwardness and brusqueness.

"I'm sorry," he said huskily. "I thought you felt that you were married to *me*. I saw something about Hutchinson not being really a clergyman, in the papers, but I never imagined it would affect *us*."

He paused, and they were all silent, appreciating more and more the difficulties of the situation that faced them.

"Of course, I'm thinking of my little girl—you can't blame me for that! I've not seen her since last Christmas," Barry offered simply.

Again Amy gave him an annihilating look. He thinking of his little girl! He had never loved her until this instant, when she supplied him with an argument forceful beyond all opposition. The full helplessness of her sister's position in his hands made Amy's heart feel weak and sick, and her eyes flashed with impotent anger.

"Could I have her for a few days, perhaps?" Barry asked. Barbara stirred herself as if arousing from a hideous trance.

"We'll arrange something tomorrow," she said.

"You're not angry at me, Barberry Bush?"

"No."

"If you want me to step aside, I will," Barry promised. "But I couldn't give my little girl up to Link Mackenzie," he added, in a moderate reasoning tone. "No man would do that! Her mother and I may not have been legally married, but I didn't know that. I acted in good faith. It was like a blow between the eyes to have a man in San Francisco tell me—only this morning!—that our marriage had been annulled.

"How could it be annulled," he went on, with sudden agitation in a dead silence, "without my knowing it?"

"There was nothing to annul; it simply didn't exist," Ward told him. He touched his arm. "The girls are dead tired, Barry," he said in an urgent undertone, "and of course this is a shock—it changes everything. We'll leave the details until tomorrow. Where are you staying?"

"I don't know," Barry said blankly. His old attitude—he never had any plans! "Maybe I could stay at Mrs Duffy's. That's near here. Has she a room?"

He would go to the very boarding house from which Barbara had sent trunk and suitcase and wedding gown for tomorrow's event! Amy's

look tried to tell him what she thought of the matter, but Barry, as always, was entirely impervious to hints.

"There'll be talk enough about all this, without your going there," Ward said. "We'll walk over to Mrs Watson's—I'll go with you and see if she has a room."

"Good-night," Barry said obediently, following him. But neither Barbara nor Amy replied.

CHAPTER XXIV

They went silently upstairs, and Barbara went into the spare room and closed the door. She straightened Kate automatically, automatically undressed and put on her old wrapper, her bright hair loosened on her shoulders.

When Amy knocked at the door, a few minutes later, Barbara sprang into bed, extinguishing the bedside lamp as she did so, and answering her sister with elaborate sleepiness from the dark.

But Amy had heard the thud of bare feet and the snap of the light, and she was not deceived.

She entered the room confidently.

"Barbara," she commanded, "light that light!"

Barbara obeyed, jerked a second pillow under her head, and lay with her arms locked behind her neck, and her haggard, violet-ringed eyes with a look of fearful expectancy in them staring at her sister.

Amy hooked an opened magazine over the crib rail to shade the eyes of the sleeping Kate, and came to perch on the foot of her sister's bed, answering Barbara's desperate look with one almost equally despairing.

"Ward hasn't come back yet," she said inconsequentially.

Barbara made no reply.

"What I'm wondering," Amy began again, "is exactly what Barry intends to do."

Again Barbara refrained from answering. She continued to regard Amy with bright, hard, feverish eyes, her under lip lightly bitten, her face pale and tense.

"You know," Amy argued it confidently and reassuringly, "he really can't *do* anything!"

"Oh, yes," Barbara said unexpectedly, with a hard little laugh, "he can. He can do everything!"

Amy's heart sank.

"You mean," she asked fearfully, "you mean that you aren't going on with your wedding tomorrow, that it's really going to make a difference in your plans?"

"Amy—in the name of everything sensible, what else could it do?" Barbara demanded impatiently, in turn.

The older sister flushed, paled. There was a silence.

"Barbara, you can't be so silly! Oh, dearest, dearest, please don't take it this way!"

"I'm not aware that I'm taking it in any special way," Barbara said wearily, with a touch of scorn. "I'm simply facing the simple fact. Kate is Barry's child, and Barry did marry me in good faith. I don't know how much claim he has on her, or exactly how much trouble he could make. . . . But I do know this," Barbara added, after a pause in which Amy had looked at her with a mixture of fear, exasperation, and pleading, "I know that the whole situation will be infinitely less complicated if I don't marry Link!"

"I could kill Barry du Spain!" Amy said, in a burst of tears.

Barbara was sitting erect, her hands locked about her knees, her eyes infinitely bitter, as they stared into space.

"I suppose it was remarkable that we didn't see this coming!" she observed mildly.

"Barbara!" Amy implored her, "remember that he has no claim on you at all!"

Barbara rested an elbow on her knees and lightly beat her forehead with a clenched fist.

"He has every claim!" she whispered, with shut eyes.

"Dearest," Amy begged, "don't break my heart! Don't let him influence you this way. The circumstances are unusual, but what of it? That doesn't make any real difference . . ."

Barbara appeared not to be hearing her. Amy's voice faded to a dismayed silence.

"I can't share Kate with him!" Barbara breathed. "That—that I couldn't do! That would be intolerable!"

"You won't have to share Kate with him. Kate has nothing to do with him!" Amy argued eagerly.

"Dragging Link into it!" Barbara muttered.

"You marry Link tomorrow," Amy began suddenly and firmly, "you leave Kate with Lucy and me, you go off on your trip. He'll loaf around here for a few days——"

Barbara's patient, scornful smile silenced her, and she was still.

"Amy, can you imagine me as settled in the Mackenzie house, just married, with Barry du Spain coming to see his daughter—with all the town saying that, while he thought himself married to me, I turned round and married Link Mackenzie! Can't you see the weapon it would give him against me, and against Kate, and against Link, for all time! You don't know Barry; that's just what he'd like! That's just the position he would like to take in this community."

"Everyone knows that Barry du Spain treated you horribly, Babs," Amy offered, in the pause.

There was an interval during which Barbara brooded darkly. After awhile she said:

"It seemed to me he did. But you heard him tonight—you heard his

version. He says that he only went off to New York to make his fortune, and by an accident I was frightened into a serious illness. He learned a few months later that the validity of our marriage was questioned, and he came straight back. That's his story. You can imagine that half the town at least will have sympathy for him!"

"He never supported you, he treated you like a slave!" Amy burst out furiously.

"Lots of men do that," Barbara reminded her. "Marriage is marriage, just the same."

"You don't even know," Amy suggested bitterly, "that he's been faithful to you! Living there in that Bohemian settlement in New York, running around with all those freaks who believe in free love and socialism, and everything, and with all the girls crazy to make eyes at him!"

"No, I don't that he's been faithful to me," Barbara conceded, "but neither do a lot of other women!"

"I would rather see you dead than have you go back to him!" Amy exclaimed, again in tears.

"Oh, *that*," Barbara answered unemotionally, suddenly getting out of bed and assuming wrapper and slippers again. "That, at least, you needn't worry about. I promise you that I will never do that! And I promise *you*, my heart," Barbara murmured, bending over the crib, and putting down her hand to loosen, with infinite gentleness, the fine silky dark curls that were caught under Kate's warmly glowing cheek on the pillow, "I promise you, Katydid, that I'll fight for you, to the last gasp," she said. And then, quite composedly, with her loose thick braid of coppery hair making her face look even whiter and more tired than before, she added, to Amy, "Come downstairs and let's start up that fire. I have to talk to Ward just for a few minutes, and we'll need you!"

Suddenly Amy opened her arms; her face was working with tears.

"Barbara, I'm sorry——" she faltered.

Barbara did not break. She put her arms about her sister and laid her cheek against Amy's.

"I'm sorry, too," she admitted, with a deep, tired sigh. They went downstairs with their hands locked.

Before they had fairly established themselves before the replenished sitting-room fire, Ward came in, his face reddened with cold night air, his hair disheveled, and his eyes anxious. The two women looked up as Amy, extending a hospitable hand with her sympathetic glance, patted the seat of an empty armchair.

The man jerked his head backward, toward the hall doorway.

"I've got Link here," he said.

Barbara whitened, bit her lip.

"Bring him in," she said in a whisper, getting to her feet.

She looked very tall and young and frightened, in her old gray wrapper, with her hair hanging in a loose braid. Her apprehensive eyes, fixed

on the door, filled with tears, as Link came quickly in, and her lip trembled piteously.

The man walked over to her and put an arm about her, bending his head to kiss her.

"It's too bad, dear, but it will be all right!" he said, smiling. But his voice was husky, and Amy thought she had never seen sunburned, florid Link Mackenzie look so pale.

They all sat down, Link in a light chair close to Barbara's armchair so that he could keep one of her hands tight in his.

"Barry back, eh?" he began, with a quick keen look. "Ward's been telling me about it."

His very voice, authoritative and quick and pleasantly husky, wrung Barbara's heart like a rack. The touch of his hands, so infinitely assured and firm, made her taste the first deathly realization of what renunciation must mean.

"What's he trying to do?" Link demanded practically.

"What did Barry du Spain ever plan!" Amy exclaimed scornfully.

Ward scratched his head perplexedly, squinted through his glasses, shaking his head.

"Just the same as ever," he said hopelessly. "He hadn't a cent, of course, he didn't know where he was going to sleep. I took him over to Watsons'—I suppose the old lady has called up half the town by this time. He's queer. One minute he isn't going to stand in Barbara's way—the next he's going to fight for his child."

"He's acting," Barbara contributed, as if thinking aloud, as she stared into the fire.

"He's always acting!" Amy exclaimed. "He has no claim on Kate!"

Barbara raised heavy eyes to Link's dark, frowning face.

"Has he, Link?" she asked.

Link shrugged.

"I don't know!" he said unwillingly. "I suppose there's never been a case just like this, before. When a man deserts a girl, and there is no marriage, she has full rights to her child. But when a man thinks he is married, and acknowledges the child——"

He hesitated.

"Or when a man chooses to *say* he thought himself married," Amy amended, "and chooses to *pretend* that he loves his child——"

"Well——" Link conceded, shrugging. And for a moment they were all silent.

"For Kate's sake," Barbara presently said, "I have to avoid publicity—I have to wait." She looked at Link. "We have to wait," she told him.

He did not answer. His big fingers continued gently to hold her hand; she felt them grind for a second, as if he were smitten by sudden pain, but his face was only filled with sorrow, and with sympathy and understanding.

"We'll be a nine-days' wonder!" the girl whispered.

Link's shrug dismissed that as unimportant.

"We must face the thing day by day and do the best we can," he said.

Barbara stood up; Amy and Ward had left the room. The fire had taken fresh hold and was burning brightly.

She felt Link's arms about her; raised her face to his.

"I thought that this time tomorrow night I would be your wife, Link," she whispered.

His kiss was crushed against her sweet and tired mouth.

"I'll wait for you, Barbara!" he told her.

"I know you will!" she whispered back.

"You'll not go back to him?"

He felt the shudder that ran through her.

"No, never that," she said. Suddenly she was crying bitterly, hopelessly, and Link took out his big soft handkerchief and wiped her eyes.

Amy and Ward came back, Barbara made no attempt to hide the fact that she had been crying. Link stood with his arm about her; the other two faced them soberly. Amy's usually placid little face looked drawn and frightened; Ward was very grave.

"That telephone call was from the Hamiltons, Barbara," Amy faltered, "and we told them the wedding was probably going to be postponed."

"Oh, yes," Barbara said faintly, "we shall have to tell them all that." She looked up at Link. "I am so sorry!" she stammered, her tears beginning to flow again.

"Well, no use talking about it any more," Ward said, in a pause.

"No, no use." She disengaged her hand from Link's and went toward the door, walking slowly, with her head drooping a little, and every line of her body tired and broken. "Good-night, Link. Good-night, everyone," she said.

"I'll go up with you!" said Amy. They went up the stairs together.

CHAPTER XXV

Through those mysterious agencies by which news spreads in a small town, it was only a few hours after Barry du Spain's return that all Cottonwood knew that he was home again, shabby, penniless, and without plans—for hadn't Amy's husband, Ward Duffy, taken him to Mrs. Watson's at ten o'clock at night and arranged for a room for him there and hadn't Barry said, right in the presence of Maxine Watson, that he didn't know how long he'd stay and immediately borrowed ten dollars from Ward Duffy? All Cottonwood was discussing this before midnight and all Cottonwood was indulging in a surmise—so exact that it amounted to positive knowledge—that Barbara Atherton and Link MacKenzie would not be married next day, whatever happened in the future.

Scores of folk found excuses to loiter past the younger Duffys' old

remodeled homestead next morning, a soft August morning, with fog shrouding the world. All the old-fashioned, tree-lined streets were filled with the softly moving ranks of the creamy mist, yet the air was balmy, and toward the southeast a yellow, sulphurous disc, halfway up the wall of the mist, showed where the sun was struggling to force an entrance.

The trees were beaded, the gardens soaked with dew. Voices came oddly abrupt and blanketed this morning, and forms loomed with startling suddenness through the enveloping vapors and disappeared again as suddenly.

The observant townsfolk saw Dr Ward Duffy come out on his own porch at about half-past eight with pretty young Mrs Duffy, who had been Amy Atherton a few years ago, accompanying him. Amy had her own baby, small and shapeless and alert, on her shoulder, and at her knee clung Barbara du Spain's beautiful child, a starry-eyed brunette with apricot cheeks and tumbled silky black curls. Little Kate du Spain's sturdy person was buttoned into a romper deliciously faded and deliciously snug; she carried a woolly dog, to which Uncle Ward had to say an affectionate good-by.

When Ward had started his car and was gone, Amy took the children back into the house and closed the door. There was no sign of Barbara, the heroine of the occasion, the woman who was to have been married in this old house at four o'clock this very afternoon.

But the men and women who were apparently casually watching the house took Kate for a substitute, and lavished upon the child the burden of their curious speculation. All that morning long, Barbara's baby was discussed.

"You'd think she'd want to make the child legitimate," some of the women said.

"But, look, she'd have to give up Link Mackenzie, and the prospect of being the most important woman in this town."

"But, look, she can't marry Link anyway, with Barry hanging round, and probably refusing to give up his child!"

"He hasn't any right to the child!"

"You don't know that. I'll bet you there's plenty of juries would give him half-rights in Kate, especially if Bar'bry refused to marry him. Nine times out of ten, it'd be the woman that was all for the marriage—this is the one time it's the other way, and you don't know that she could get away with it. Kate spending half the time with Barbara, living like a princess in Link Mackenzie's place, and the other time gipsying round with Barry du Spain!"

Then fresh reports: "The newspaper men have just been over to Duffys. Old Mrs Duffy is there now, and Professor Atherton. They say Barbara's as cool as a cucumber!" and "Loretta Bridges, down at the telephone board, told her mother that the Duffys have been calling up everyone, and saying that the wedding is indefinitely postponed!"

And with great excitement at ten o'clock: "Link's there now—at Ward

Duffy's. And Una telephoned Mrs Watson, and she says Barry du Spain isn't up yet."

If the eager eyes and ears could have followed Link into Amy's little library, they would have found, as he did, Amy, Barbara, and their father sitting there, with Amy's warm-hearted old mother-in-law, who had come over just as soon as the boarders' breakfast was out of the way, much in the same spirit that carried her to births, funerals, and all the other emergencies in the families of her friends.

Indeed, there was something entirely funereal in the atmosphere of the house that was still decorated with wedding flowers. The women looked up apathetically, expectantly, as Link came in, and there was a general sigh as he stooped to give Barbara a quick kiss and took the chair beside her.

"Get any sleep, dear?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, yes! I wakened up rather early," Barbara answered in the same key.

"Has Barry been over?"

"Not yet. He sent a message about half an hour ago. He's coming in at noon."

"Do you know, Amy, just what he plans to do?"

"No," Amy answered, "and we don't think he does. Dad and Judge Cobb went in to see him, he was in bed—all tously and everything, Dad said. He says that he doesn't mean to interfere with Barbara's plans, and a lot of stuff like that, but that, *if* a man believes he is married to a woman, and wants to protect his child when he finds he is not, doesn't the law give him any rights?"

"As a matter of fact, it does not," said Professor Atherton.

"My plan," Link said, with an anxious glance at Barbara's white, tired face, "would be to call off the wedding this afternoon——"

"Oh, yes, we'll have to do that!" Barbara said faintly.

"And then, later in the day, get quietly married, and slip away, and take Kate with us," Link pursued eagerly. "Barry can investigate then and if he finds he has no claim, he will probably disappear long before we get back."

For one instant a wild light of hope brightened Barbara's eyes, but immediately she subsided into weariness and despondency again, and shook her head.

"No, we can't do that," she said. "He mightn't disappear. He might get ugly. It would put us all into a hopelessly compromised situation. There must be some other way than that?"

"You'll see how patient I can be, Barbara," Link said cheerfully.

"I know already that there is no one else in the world just like you, Link," the girl answered, with brimming eyes. Amy began to cry silently.

"Now I'm going down to the office, just as if it were any other day," Link observed, with a sort of quiet hardiness. "You can get me there at any minute. I'll be up again, around two, and this afternoon I'd like to

take you for a drive—bring Kate, if you like. My father suggested that we dine with him. It won't be," Link added, with a smile, "exactly Del Monte, but we must just take the thing day by day, and presently it'll be over, and I'll have my wife, safe in my own home, never to be out of my sight again!"

They were standing, as he said the last words, and Barbara, in the circle of his arms, raised her face for his kiss. But she could not speak.

When he was gone, she sat silent while Amy and Mrs Duffy murmured on, while Amy's baby slept at his mother's breast, and Professor Atherton took Kate on a long and microscopic tour of the garden. The mist had lifted now, and the sun was hot; there was not a breath to stir the heavy foliage of the high trees.

It was well after twelve when Barry came in. In the broad daylight Barbara could see how shabby he was; his wrists showed at the shiny cuffs of his sleeves, and his trousers had not known a tailor's care for many weeks.

His beautiful face was tired and distressed, and after a nod of greeting to Amy and Mrs Duffy, he went as far as was humanly possible toward disarming the two hostile, watching women, by his first words.

"Barbara, I've been thinking all this over. It must be hellishly hard for you. I've come to ask you what you want me to do?"

Amy and Mrs Duffy exchanged glances that were surprised, and even faintly mollified. But Barbara knew this tone only too well.

"Your father and old Cobb came in this morning," Barry pursued. "They tell me I haven't any claim on the baby, Barbara." He looked up, scowling, and finished on a little rueful smile. "Well, that's all right," he said philosophically, "if that's the law, that's the law."

He ground his palms together, his old familiar gesture, looked down at the linked hands that were hanging between his knees, looked up again.

"But I'm going to stay here near her. I'm going to make good and have her know and love her Daddy, whether she belongs to him or not," he said simply. "You're going to be married to Link this afternoon—all right. My loving you—my having thought for three years that you were mine—hasn't anything to do with it. But—but could you leave the baby with me, just for your honeymoon, Barbara? I'd take her down to the ranch; she'd be happy with me, children always are. And maybe—maybe it would help me to live through the days when I know you belong to Link—know that you aren't ever going to be mine any more."

Mrs Duffy, departing kitchenward with some vague thought of extracting lunch from the confusion and stagnation that reigned there, was visibly affected by this. But Amy had had time to recover herself now, and she directed toward Barry an unconvinced and contemptuous eye.

"I want to talk to you," Barry began, when he and the sisters were alone. He glanced at Amy significantly.

But Amy gave no sign of moving, and instantly Barbara said:

"I'd rather have Amy here, Barry. There's nothing to say."

He came over to her side, as Link had done, and if he did not pointedly exclude Amy from the conversation, at least his turned shoulder and lowered tone indicated how distasteful to him was her presence.

"There's this to say, Barbara," Barry pleaded. "Through it all—no matter what a fool I've been!—it had been because I loved you. I'm not a business man; I can't sell real estate or write policies, but I *did* work for you, in my own way! We—we were happy, Barbara," he faltered, his eyes suddenly filling with tears, his thin, ungroomed hand holding tightly to hers. "Those first days down at the hacienda—when we cleared the cellar—and you fed the hens——"

She took her hand away, linked her fingers, and, leaning back in her deep chair, rested her clasped hands on her breast.

"Yes, we were happy then, we were like children then," she said steadily, and Amy's heart leaped for joy at hearing the composure, the inflexible determination in her tone. "But we are not children now, Barry. If everything had gone well with us, we might have built that time into a happier time—it might be just a memory of poverty and—and youth, such as so many people have!

"But it didn't go well with us," she pursued, as he watched her patiently and anxiously, and Amy's concerned look enveloped them both, "it didn't go well. You were the man, and you got out. I was the woman—and I couldn't get out!"

"I got out to make money, to succeed—for you!" Barry interpolated.

"Yes, I know, that's what you said, that's what men always say," Barbara answered. "I wonder if they ever think how easy it is—to give up the stupid drudgery of the problem they've failed to solve and be off to new problems! Traveling on trains—meeting new faces——"

"I hate trains, I hate strangers," Barry put in sulkily, as she paused.

But Barbara was not listening to him. Her narrowed eyes were fixed on space; she was speaking dreamily, as if to herself.

"I had Kate, little and troublesome and exacting," she said, after a moment, "and I was chained to the new baby—waiting to be freshly burdened, doubly tied down, and without a cent, and without any knowledge of where the food and clothes were coming from for the next few years!"

"I gave you all I had," Barry reminded her, very white.

"That's the woman's part of it," Barbara resumed. "Wait—hope—fill the bottles, jump up in the cold nights, wash and cook and sweep, through the lonely days, and realize—as I've realized so many times!—that at any minute some pretty girl far away may be asking a man she admires: 'Are you married, Mr du Spain?'

"Realizing," Barbara added, with bitter force, "that the very man whose kitchen one is sweeping, whose little helpless children one is tending, may—if he likes!—tell anyone that he is *not* married! And many of

them do like to deny it," Barbara said, her eyes flashing with angry tears. She dashed them away.

"If anyone ever says that I ever denied that I adored my wife, and was only working and slaving to get back to her——" Barry began hotly. But she silenced him.

"You used to come back from San Francisco and tell me about the women who were crazy about you," she observed indifferently. "But that isn't the point. The point was that we started even, you and I—were just a young man and a young girl beginning marriage together. But the cards are always stacked against the woman! Within a few months it was *I*—I who was physically handicapped, who was sick and tearful and helpless, it was I who bore the child and had to submit to your comings and goings in silence, because a woman with a young baby is helpless—she is absorbed, she isn't attractive to her husband in the old way, and she knows it!"

"I loved you!" Barry said thickly, grinding his palms together, his desolate eyes full of tears.

"You say you did, just as lots of men do. But if *I* loved anyone," Barbara said, accusation in her voice, "I could make sacrifices for that person. I can stay up all night with Kate, I'd die for Amy or her baby here, and she knows it.

"Men aren't like that. You loved me, but you were furious when you knew the second baby was coming—you left me alone for three days, then. And afterward, when I was sick, and worried, and lonely, caring for Kate all day and all night, washing, cooking, feeding the chickens—you didn't love me then!"

"I did!" Barry affirmed resentfully, "you know I did! It was *because* I felt it so deeply, *because* it made me so frantic to see you tired and worried and ill, that I couldn't *stand* it!"

Barbara looked at him speculatively for a long while. But there was no indecision in her quiet look.

"Well, anyway, you went away," she said unemotionally. "And a man who was mentally twisted, who is in the state asylum for the insane now, came creeping down there, in the dark of night——"

She fell silent, and in her eyes was the reflection of an unforgettable horror.

Barry looked up quickly, his eyes resentful. But if he would have said: "That wasn't my fault!" he thought better of it, and did not speak.

"Fortunately," Barbara went on, "Link came down that night—it was my birthday night. He brought us home——"

Her dreamy eyes were full of a strange liquid light now, and her lips touched with a smile.

"They saved me, with surgery and blood transfusions and stimulants," she finished, after a pause. "But, except for that, I would have died!"

Barry was studying her scornfully, an ugly expression in his eyes.

"And so your life belongs to your hero!" he sneered.

Amy made a scandalized little exclamation and looked at him indignantly. But before she could speak Barbara spoke.

"Yes, my life belongs to Link," she acknowledged gravely. Her thoughts went to the stately big white brick mansion under the trees, the awninged windows, the dreaming garden and lawns. And for a moment she forgot the events of the past twenty-four hours, and imagined herself Link's wife, mistress of Link's splendid home.

"If I had Link's money——" Barry began insinuatingly.

Amy said, "Oh, shame!" indignantly. But Barbara, long used to his argumentative characteristics, did not even flush.

"You have nothing, Barry," she told him. "And just this once, life has given the wife the whip hand. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred it would be *I*—I with my two or three little babies, and my empty pocketbook, who was pleading to be remarried. I would be haunting the courts, and you would be free!

"But this once it is different. If you and I *were* legally married, to save my character with all the women of this town I would have to go back to the hacienda with you this afternoon, give up my job, perhaps bear more babies, and go on washing and struggling and cooking, because you were my husband, and that's marriage.

"I couldn't even divorce you for desertion or non-support; you had given me a home, and you were working as hard as you could to support it. Perhaps, after awhile, I might have gotten a divorce. But even then to marry me Link would have had to give up his faith, and his job, and his father and sisters!

"Yes, just this once," Barbara concluded, in a silence, "just this once it's all different. I'm free. And after generations of women who have accepted the man's law, and crept into legitimate marriage because of the children, I'm going to stay free!"

"So that's your decision?" Barry asked, in a heavy, menacing tone, after a pause.

"That *has* to be my decision, Barry."

"And Kate's side of it—her growing up in another man's house, with her father right here in town, that doesn't matter?"

"That's the lesser evil, Barry."

She did not speak so much coldly as with a sort of deliberate patience, but the man's face reddened as if she had struck him.

"I thought you were the sort of woman who would stick to a man when he was down and out!" he said slowly and bitterly.

Barbara, to Amy's amazement, remained unmoved.

"Perhaps I am not," she answered, in the silence.

For a long minute Barry continued to regard her steadily, a sort of cold fury in his eye. Then he got to his feet.

"Well, it must be strange to be able to treat another human being—and one who loves you!—as you've treated me," he said, with a hard laugh.

"It *is* strange," Barbara said slowly, as if she were musing.

Barry went out of the house immediately afterward. His face was set and white, and his eyes strangely darkened. But he walked along the street with his old jaunty swing, and it was Barbara who collapsed, and who felt frightened, confused, and sick when he was gone.

Link returned at about half-past two, and sat quietly beside the couch where she was lying; her blue eyes were ringed in faint lavender shadows, and her face was pale. She put her fingers in his limply, and while they talked, he held them in his own, brown, hard hand.

"All the town buzzing, I suppose, Link?"

"Let 'em buzz. They have to buzz about something!"

"It's horrible!" Barbara said in a whisper, with shut eyes.

"It's just one of those things that happen," Link said vaguely, indifferently.

"What do you think will happen next, Link?"

"I don't know," he said. "But I know something will, and whatever it is, it will give us our cue. And what do we care—we love each other! Lucy, by the way, is all upset, and sent you her love, and said she would come in when things quieted down a little. Margaret's coming in late this afternoon. She was going off to Tahoe tomorrow, anyway, and I think she'll still go."

"What do you suppose Barry will do?" Barbara asked fearfully.

Amy, who had come in and was sitting beside the window, said promptly:

"I know this. Mrs Watson told him she needed that room tonight, and so he won't stay there!"

"Poor Barry!" Link said. "I know that he went into the Bank, and tried to borrow some money, but they wouldn't hear of it."

"Well, perhaps if they treat him that way, he'll get out!" Amy observed, with vindictive satisfaction.

Ward, returning from his afternoon round, could add to the report.

"Harris was telling me that Barry came down to the garage about one o'clock and asked for a car to take him out to the ranch," Ward said, "but Harris wouldn't do it on credit. From what he said, I imagine he went down to the ranch anyway, and I imagine he walked. Anyway, he started on foot. He's sure to get a lift, if it's only on a haycart, this season."

Barbara lay still, listening, thinking. And when Link went back to the office for a little while she lay still, thinking of Barry.

Poor, handsome, headstrong Barry, once a happy, gifted, popular boy, drifting about the town, laughing and writing rhymes, picnicking with Barbara Atherton down on the old Mission Creek, playing writing games with the Athertons in the winter evenings! Jealous, eager, clever —how had it happened that life had served him so badly before his thirtieth year!

Rejected by Barbara, separated from his child, without a cent, without

friends or credit, utterly alone. Suddenly she found her heart aching for him painfully, with a sort of obsession. She imagined him, shabby and tired and discouraged with her father's and Judge Cobb's verdict cutting away his last defenses, and with her own denial of friendship to add to theirs.

Whatever his faults—and no one knew Barry's better than she!—no man quite deserved this; to be made ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of his own township, to sneak away from Washington Street in the gathering autumn dusk and hide his head.

Alone—it was a horrible thing to be. It would be especially horrible to Barry, with his overdeveloped sensitiveness and his overdeveloped imagination.

Suddenly, hurriedly, she was sitting erect on the couch, she was straightening her disordered dress and buttoning herself into a long, warm coat. A soft shapeless hat was pulled down over her unruly copper hair, and Barbara, pulling on a pair of loose gloves, had slipped out of the side door and was walking the two blocks that separated the senior Duffys' house from the junior Duffys'.

There was an old riding horse in the stable that was far back of the mansarded house, on a quiet lane. Sometimes Ward had ridden him, years ago; now he spent most of his time idling in the yard. Barbara had had more than one early morning ride on his back of late months with Link on his famous buckskin beside her.

This afternoon she put the saddle over his back with trembling fingers, fastened the straps nervously, quickly, and slipped the bit in between his enormous yellow teeth; almost as she opened the barn door into the lane she climbed into the saddle, and they were moving toward the highway to the south.

Perhaps some of the townspeople saw her, and wondered. But she saw nothing and nobody; she was only vaguely conscious of the miles and the moving scene about her.

The garden fences and trees stopped, flat brown fields, struck by the full flood of the westering sun, were on either side. It was after three o'clock, and Portuguese, Italian, and Japanese children were straggling down the long miles toward the outlying ranches.

Barbara rode on at an easy gallop. She had not the slightest idea of what her intention was in going down to the ranch. Nothing had formed itself in her mind to say; she merely felt a deep need of Barry's presence, she felt that she must find him, and that he must hear her.

At Milo's one little store she stopped and bought bread and butter and sugar and coffee; the Portuguese proprietor brought back the same sharp pain to her heart, the same fluttering urgent fear, by explaining volubly why he had not felt himself justified in trusting Mr du Spain with a small grocery order.

"Oh? How long ago was he here?"

"Hour, maybe. Maybe not so much."

Feeling oddly a pioneer, with her basket over her arm, and with a wild excitement growing even through the heavy sadness of her heart, Barbara remounted and took the familiar road from the highway to the hacienda.

CHAPTER XXVI

Its aspect shocked her; it looked so lonely, so deserted in the sunset. The long, pipe-tiled roofs seemed to have shrunk down under the shabby peppers and eucalyptus; the fences were broken, the walls and roofs of the barns showed actual gaps. In the patio drifts of leaves had packed and rotted; Barbara felt that they might have been away, Barry and Kate and she, for eight years, rather than as many months.

Sunshine was red and gracious over the whole place, and the sea lisped its eternal whisper on the shore. The flagged floor of the patio was already grown with weeds and littered with fallen branches and leaves, but the door of the kitchen stood open; Barry was here.

She went to the door noiselessly and looked within.

He was at the old table, he had flung himself carelessly into a chair. His head was down on his arm, his rich black hair in careless disorder.

All about him was the desolation of the big room that had been their home for some eighteen or twenty tempestuous, hopeful, busy months. The stove was cold now, rusted and cracked, the fireplace, in which a few silvery ashes puffed mildly, as Barbara crossed the room, was cold. The world outside was dazzling with light, but in here there was already twilight, between the low, smoke-stained ceiling and the satiny old tiles of the floor.

Memory came back in a chilling rush. The couch where she and Kate had slept, the sink where she had struggled with can-openers and dish towels, the old drying-line still dangling above the stove, the old brass lamp still occupying the center of the table.

A thousand recollections of soup and lard, spots and smells, hunger and weariness, of mice and chickens, of special fatigues and special coldnesses and darknesses assailed her, and she looked about the dreary place as a prisoner might look upon an old cell, with a shudder. Kate had been born in this room.

She put up her hand on Barry's shoulder, and he started up in amazement and caught at her fingers, with a cry of incredulity and longing, almost as if he thought her a ghost.

"Barbara! Barberry Bush!"

She could not speak; she stood holding his hands, breathing deeply, trying to smile.

"Who's with you?" Barry asked quickly with a glance at the door.

"Nobody. I came down alone."

"Driving?"

"No. On the Duffys' old horse."

She sat down at the table, and he knelt at her feet, and put her hands to his lips. And all the joy and beauty of youth had returned to his face.

"Barbara, in all your life you never did anything as kind as this! Oh, my God, if you knew what I've been going through!"

Suddenly she felt that he was only a little boy—her little boy. She freed a hand, and laid it on his hair.

"I can imagine it!" she said briefly.

Breaking all at once he put his arms about her, and dropped his head on her breast as if he were exhausted. His eyes were closed, he was breathing deeply, like a spent child.

"Poor Barry—my poor old Barry!" Barbara said, infinitely tender. And her voice sounded like a silver bell in the silence of the room.

"Oh, Barberry, Barberry, don't be kind to me—you'll kill me! I love you so!" he sobbed, clinging to her. And as he pressed his face against hers, grasping her tightly, she felt that his cheek was wet. "I was going to kill him!" he whispered.

"Link?"

"Link. Damn him! And I wanted to kill you—Amy—everyone who is laughing at me—who hates me——"

Barbara smoothed his hair.

"They don't hate you. They aren't laughing at you. You mustn't take —things—so hard!"

"Oh, I don't care!" he gasped, on a great breath of exhaustion and relief. "I don't care what they do, if you're not against me—if you're not angry with me. Amy! She doesn't count. None of them count but you."

The full revulsion of his feeling had broken him completely, and he could only hold her tightly, as if the touch of warm, human sympathy were his anchor and his healing.

"You came down here alone!"

"I got worrying," Barbara confessed, with her blue-eyed smile. She sat down, Barry knelt beside her. "I couldn't have them saying—thinking —such things of you," she went on.

Barry leaned backward a little and looked at her with wet eyes; his face was flushed, his hair disordered.

"You are the most wonderful woman in the world," he said slowly, solemnly. "I thought, a few minutes ago, that I hated all life! But see—see how easily you bring it all back, Barberry Bush! That you came to me, all alone——

"Why," Barry faltered, his eyes suddenly brimming again, "you *must* still love me a little, you must still care for me a little, or you wouldn't have done that?"

Her arms were linked loosely about his neck, she rested her face against his hair.

"I don't know," she said wearily, and sighed.

"A little?" he asked jealously, something of his old buoyancy already returned to his voice.

"I know that I can't leave you to fight it out alone, with them all against you, Barry. We're not legally married, you and I. And yet there is something stronger, something deeper than the law—where a man and a woman are concerned. I belonged to you—for all those months. I belong to you still, somehow. Today, when you were shabby, and the Bank turned you down . . ."

Barbara was speaking gently as if half to herself. Now her voice drifted into silence, and they remained silent for a full minute, the man's arms locked about her waist, as he knelt before her, and her hand on his hair.

"Women are like that, I suppose, or some women are," the girl began again, in a puzzled voice. "It came to me—that I had to stand by you, just as I would by Kate. There's no other way of happiness for me."

"Barberry," Barry said solemnly, when she had stopped speaking, and for awhile there had been no sound in the dim old room, "you won't be sorry. This is the turning point of my whole life! I'll make you proud of me yet."

Did she believe him? She would have liked to believe him. But under the familiar accents, the eager, confident promises, she only saw and heard the old Barry, undisciplined and vacillating and changeable with every wind.

He believed himself, she knew, as he gripped her with the hungry fervor or relief from unendurable solitude, and poured out to her the story of the past few months, the disappointments and disillusionments, the frustrated designs and ruined hopes.

There had been a presentation of *Napoleon Third* in New York City; Barry's pocketbook was bulging with flattering press notices. He was the new Keats, the new Shelley; Du Spain was to be "watched for further demonstrations of his extraordinary gift."

But the play had been performed but eight times, and the producer was even now trying to come to some settlement with the outraged members of an unpaid cast. Barbara could only gather that Barry had assuaged his disappointment in a prolonged interval of intemperance, before he had managed to work, borrow, and beg his way home. Thirty-two hundred miles from New York City to Cottonwood, penniless, discouraged, alone—it had been like a nightmare, he said.

"I kept thinking if I would once get to you, Barberry Bush, once see you and get my arms about you again, nothing would matter! I kept thinking that if once I were here, safe, talking it over with you, everything would be all right! As the miles went by, and I got nearer and nearer, it was like a sort of fever.

"Barberry—Barberry—Barberry——" he repeated the name, after a pause. "Your eyes, and your old blue kitchen aprons, and your way of seeing things clearly—I was so hungry for you! I thought that to be just

once more in the old kitchen, down here, talking, with the baby in her high chair, and the chickens picking around the patio, and the smell of the sea coming in, under the pepper trees——

"You don't know how crowded, how dirty and close and mercenary the big cities are. Everybody jammed against everybody else, everything costing money—money, money, you can't turn around without it!"

"This old place, shabby and poor as it is, seemed like heaven to me. I made up my mind I'd take a job with Fox, work around here on Sundays and holidays, play with Kate—I made up my mind that I'd make it all up to you——"

He paused, staring into space, his dark eyes lighted with hope and with dreams. Barbara did not speak, her gaze was fixed thoughtfully, with a sort of wise and sorrowful speculation, on his face.

Barry roused himself from a moment of trance.

"And then I heard that you had taken that silly business of the clergyman seriously—Ferguson, Hutchinson, what was his name?" he went on, in a changed voice—"and that you were going to be married to Link Mackenzie—my God, I almost went crazy! I'd seen the marriage validity story in one of the New York papers, and that all the couples he married were being remarried. And if I thought about it at all, I only thought that you'd hate that sort of notoriety, and that you and I would of course be married again, when I got back."

He shook his head, as if to shake away his thoughts.

"Lord, what a day—what a day!" he ejaculated. "I lay awake almost all night, worrying—heartbroken, after what you had said. This morning your father and that old ass Cobb came in, to tell me that I was all wrong in thinking Kate was my property and you were my wife, and that you were going to move into the Mackenzie place.

"Then Ward, and Amy, and that beastly Mrs Watson practically turning me out of her house, and the new man at the Bank—I'd never seen him before, using his damnable little brief authority—even Castro, at Milo, wouldn't trust me for some bread and meat."

The woman was hardly hearing him. Her eyes were fixed on space, and her thoughts already going forward to what must be her future.

The dark, plastered, distempered walls of the kitchen seemed to typify it; she knew their every stain and crack by heart. She knew the smell of the pungent pepper leaves, and the sweet aromatic breath of the eucalyptus tassels, brought in from the patio on the late afternoon breezes. She knew how low the autumn sun must be, before that triangle of blood-red light found its way under the narrow-tiled porch that sheltered the western window and shone on the kitchen wall.

The past eight months had vanished in mist; she was Barbara du Spain again, Kate was asleep in the adjoining bedroom, there were bowls of soup and stewed tomatoes and cold rice pudding in the gaunt, mice-scented pantry for supper. Her old aprons, her old problems; the gathering of warm brown eggs with tiny wisps of feather clinging to them,

the rinsing of wet clothes, and snapping them in the dim, smoky kitchen, so that from them a fine, warm fog blew in her face—the old life seemed to live again.

Again there were bay logs in the fireplace, with creamy sap bubbling from their fresh-cut ends, again driftwood, smooth and silvery, was burning blue on the fire. Again there would be pools in January, caked with ice, and ice in the shriveled cold wheel tracks that spread like antennæ all over the flat meadows, and again the rain—falling and falling and falling in the dim, quiet, empty afternoons.

Silence, through all the long dreamy days, except for the babble of the baby, and the intermittent creak of the windmill, and the occasional scandalized undertone of a squawking hen. Stewed onions, and sponge cake tonight, and milk, and the sausages again—— She came out of her musing with a start. Barry had rested his head against her breast once more, he appeared utterly wearied, utterly at peace. Now and then he shifted slightly, and tightened the hold of his embracing arms, and shook, like a terrier, the rich black mop that had fallen carelessly backward from his forehead, and when he did this he muttered: "My God, I love you!"

It was his old phrase, when he was tired of altercation, of argument, of anger. Many a night he had left his own bed, in the icy chamber next the kitchen, and crept repentant and wearied back to Barbara's arms, back to Barbara's kisses. And it was always with the words, fervent, hungry, passionately loving: "My God, I love you!"

"You won't desert me, Barberry Bush?" he murmured, after awhile.

"Never, dear."

"Is it going to be terribly hard for you?"

A fleeting thought of the big rooms of the Mackenzie house assailed her, the elm branches moving in summer sunshine outside of the opened windows; Tilly busy in the big sunshiny kitchen, Link's car parked by the side door, croquet balls clicking on the shadowed lawn, and white-clad women and men idling and talking under the trees.

And when the world went away from the Mackenzie home, and twilight fell, she thought of a man and woman turning together toward the quiet and beauty of their own big rooms, talking together, reading together, breakfasting in morning brightness—always together. The awninged windows, the polished floors with their sprawled silky rugs, the winter fires, the spring trophies of wild iris and the first lilacs—only a part of the home they loved. . . .

She stroked Barry's hair slowly. She mustn't think of Link, now. She was back at the hacienda with Barry.

"It won't be as hard as feeling that you needed me and I failed you," she said. "Nobody has a right to say to anyone else what I said to you today, Barry; it isn't true that one person is a failure, or a success, more than another. We're all in the same boat."

She fell silent, but her hand went on slowly, gently stroking the dark head that was resting against her heart.

"Barbara, stay in my boat," he besought her humbly, "and I'll steer better this time!"

A long pause.

"I think you will!" she said.

"We'll begin all over again. I'm not going to try to write poetry any more—I'm going in with Fox. You'll see how I sell real estate!"

A weary premonition of difficulties already chilled her. Link had planned to subdivide and sell the ranch, slowly, over a space of years. This was to have been Kate's portion. Was it conceivable that Barry would agree to this arrangement? In any case, he could hardly be working for Fox in the interest of a rival development.

No matter. Plenty of time to think of that!

"Barry, have you anything to eat, here?"

She walked about the kitchen, her old, old battleground, straightening and investigating. The humped blankets on the couch smelled musty: there were no sheets. Barbara stooped to open a dark doorway under the iron sink; an odor of pipes, mould, and dampness rushed out.

"You must make yourself a good fire, here, dry these things out. And I brought some bread and coffee—there must be some things here. We came down, Amy and Ward and I, one Sunday this summer, and packed a few sheets and the silver spoons."

"I'll be in cotton wool," Barry assured her, undaunted.

"Here's salt—here's sugar. I'll stop at Maria's on my way back and ask them to bring you down some milk."

"Ask her if she has any cream," Barry suggested.

And this trifling addition was so exactly like him that Barbara felt suddenly checked and cold, with a sort of despair creeping through her veins. He was entirely incapable of understanding; he would always be incapable of understanding.

"You are the best woman I ever knew, Barberry Bush. Coming down here today was the loveliest thing you ever did, or anyone ever did!"

He said it over and over again, but she knew he did not understand this either.

"You'll not be too uncomfortable, Barry?"

"Uncomfortable! When I've been hungering for weeks and weeks just to get back?"

The girl gave a last look about the dark room; a woodfire had been started now, and was fuming in long writhing banners of smoke about the damp logs. Occasional whiffs of stifling smoke puffed into the kitchen. A pool of rusty water stood on the range; the flagged floor was littered with chips and leaves.

And still the triangle of blood-red sinking sunshine came in at the low western doorway, and lay bright on the discolored old plaster wall. The garden side of the kitchen, the eastern front, was cold and dark and shadowy, beyond the iron-barred window.

They stood in the doorway, parting, the young pair who had lived here

once as man and wife. Barry's hair was tumbled into a dark disorderly mop, his face was flushed and stained with tears, his dark eyes alight with emotional excitement. Barbara looked tired, tall and gentle and strangely subdued, in her rough, long buttoned coat and little soft hat.

"I know you, and I know Link!" Barry exulted with all a child's satisfaction in being sorry and being forgiven. "And I know that he isn't your sort. We're different from these rubes, Barberry. You wait—we'll show them!"

A strained look came into her suddenly whitened face.

"Barry—you mustn't forget that I'm giving him up for you. You mustn't forget that I—I've come to love him——"

His confident laugh interrupted the stammered words.

"It won't take me long to make you forget Link Mackenzie! He isn't the kind of man to hold you very long."

She dared not think of the sunburned face with its grave concern, and its sudden, transforming smile for her, the shoulders that were squared, under Link's favorite tweeds, to carry her burdens, to make her life easier. Link's finely groomed big lean hands, busy with the wheel of the car—with the fountain pen he always produced when calculations of time or money were in order—with the croquet mallet—how strong they were—how kind they were. . . .

"Barry—I've got to get over, or to partly get over, feeling as I do toward Link, before there could be any talk of our—of our really commencing again—as man and wife, I mean."

He was looking down at her from his superb height, his smiling eyes unafraid. He began gently to shake her to and fro by the shoulders, an old custom that typified a sort of mental and spiritual shaking as well.

"Why, you don't think you're in love with him?" he chaffed.

Barbara's color came back in a glorious rush.

"No, not in love," she answered. "What I feel is more than that. Just plain—love. Just—all that a woman can feel for a man. Just—worship, that's all!"

Barry drew back, and an affronted look came into his eyes.

"Why do you talk that way?" he said, displeased. "Link Mackenzie happened to come along when you needed him, and afterward loaned you some money. That's all! And I've adored you all my life."

Barbara was looking at him thoughtfully, speculatively, unstirred by what he said, although she was still breathing a little quickly from the emotion of her own admission, a few moments before.

"I just wanted you to understand, Barry," she said mildly.

"Understand that you're in love with Link Mackenzie!" Barry interpreted, magnificently scornful. "That's a nice way for us to start over," he added. "I come back to you and put all my cards on the table! I haven't made money, I grant you, I haven't been successful. All right—that isn't my fault. Gissing and Poe and Keats and Shelley weren't so successful, either, if it comes to that. . . ."

The old vibrating, fatally facile tone, flowing on and on without effort. As she watched him, pouring out the angry, eager sentences, the flush of generous self-immolation that had brought her down to him, in his hour of need today, died coldly to ashes, and sober reason and a simple sense of what was expedient began to take its place.

"What got you," Barry was saying, with a faint accent on the last word, and his old air of being able completely to understand and interpret the ways of women, "what got you was the Mackenzie house, and the Mackenzie money—I don't mean entirely—I mean that any woman would take those into consideration. Link—what's he done? With his red face and his damn Y. M. C. A. airs—talking to employees and posing around in his roadster!"

"Barry, don't talk foolishly." This was in the old, restrained tone of rigidly enforced endurance. "I tell you," Barbara went on patiently as the man was silent, satisfying himself with only a smoldering and scornful look, "that it *is* hard for me to do this, that—we might as well face it, Barry!—everything is going to be hard. You'll have to get a job, you'll have to make good in the eyes of Cottonwood, for my sake, and for Kate's——"

"Oh? That's it, is it? Perhaps Link would give me a job!"

Silence. Barbara sighed.

"You waste time, taking that tone," she reminded him, looking away, slightly pursing her lips and narrowing her eyes.

He was suddenly penitent.

"Yes, I know. You're quite right. I've got to get a job, do I?—and satisfy all the old biddies in town that I'm capable of supporting a wife. All right."

Folding his long arms, setting his jaw determinedly, he stared into space, his nostrils moving stormily in the violence of emotion this concession cost him.

"Link and I have been talking of dividing this place into lots, Barry. Perhaps you could get into that—that would be a dignified way to work your way into real estate, anyway."

His startled eyes met hers, amazement kept him silent for an incredulous half minute.

"What place?"

"This place. The ranch."

"Divide it!"

"Divide it into a hundred and seventeen lots, and sell them off gradually. Link doesn't want to make anything sensational or rapid about it. Joe Miller thinks it's a sound proposition—they're talking of calling it 'Southsea Garden.'"

He stared at her wildly, laughed aloud.

"This place! *My* place!"

"It isn't your place. You gave it to me."

A moment of consideration. Then he said slowly:

"I did give it to you. But you were my wife!"

"Whether I was your wife or not, you gave it to me. It was just at the time we were married, you remember you and I used to discuss it, and the mortgage, and so on, and you said you wanted me to have it. The deed was signed two days before we were married, as a matter of fact."

"My God—my place! And you've sold it to Link, have you?"

"No, I haven't sold it to him at all. I tell you we are merely discussing this, in Kate's interest."

"Ah, well!" he breathed naturally again. "I thought you'd committed yourself!" he said, in relief. And then, in an undertone: "Isn't that like those tight-fisted Mackenzies—dragging my kid in, pretending it's all being done for the baby's benefit! Well, I guess we can double-cross him this time. Nothing," he ended firmly, "nothing would ever persuade me to divide this place or part with it—I'll tell Link Mackenzie that, or you can! By the Lord Harry, it was about time I came back!"

Barbara offered no combative suggestion to this, perfectly familiar with the evanescent quality of his moods. The more violently he railed, the less difficult would be the business of winning him to a perfectly different standpoint. But every word he had said had steeled her own spirit anew, and it was in a tone that he had never heard from her in his life before that she could say:

"There's no need to quarrel about it. When you see it all on paper, you'll realize that it is ridiculous to go on paying taxes and interest on this place, and getting no revenue at all from it. We couldn't sell it as a ranch for the price of the mortgage—Link put a second mortgage on, for me, only a few months ago, for almost a thousand dollars' worth of overdue taxes. The Bank has carried us for two years."

"It's my home—my grandfather's home! I love every inch of it," Barry persisted.

"You would have to live in town, Barry——" Barbara was beginning when he interrupted her.

"I? You, too! You'd be with me!"

"That's too far ahead—any possibility of that—for us to discuss now," she said soberly, bravely.

"Any possibility! Then what, in God's name, brought you down here?" he demanded, instantly furious.

"Because," she answered steadily, "I wanted you to know that one person would stand by you. I didn't want you to feel that all the world was against you—or that I thought all the fault had been on your side!"

"Ha!" he ejaculated scornfully, leaning against the doorway now, with his arms crossed on his breast, "*thank* you!"

She could ignore his irony, in her desperate eagerness not to fail him, or rather, not to fail the finer instincts in herself that his need had called into life.

"Barry," she pleaded, "can't you be natural, simple about all this? We shall never get out of the bog unless you are. Can't you get a job and

work your way up as other men do? Everyone in town will stand back of you, if you'll just stop—*acting,* stop dramatizing yourself——" Barbara groped for words. "If you'll just show that you are in earnest, and mean to make good!"

"Oh, that's what you came down to tell me, is it? Take a job in some life insurance office and board at the Watsons'?"

"That's a silly tone to take," she commented coldly and disapprovingly in the pause.

"It's so like you, Barbara," he presently said stingingly, "to come galloping down here, regular Paul Revere stuff, with a lot of guff about loving me, and not wanting to fail me, and then putting a lot of strings on it—and qualifying and conditioning it, like an old maid! If I'll pour myself into the damn' Methodist mold, and scrape and scrape and lift my hat every time Link Mackenzie goes by——"

"Good-by. I'm sorry it's turned out like this!" the girl presently interrupted the stream abruptly. She had failed, it was no use. She walked away from the kitchen door and across the patio toward her horse. Barry followed her restlessly, uncomfortably, as she knew he would.

She untied the halter, put a left foot on the old chopping block, mounted to the saddle. It was still broad daylight outside, toward the west the sun was sinking regally in enveloping veils of opal fog. The sea was shining in wrinkled levels of gently seething and swelling silk. Gulls wheeled and piped over the long, feather-edged curves of the surf. Toward the south, a score of headlands cut the shore into scallops, the wandering brown-white line of the coast road disappeared over the low rise of the hills. Abalone Rock stood bold and dark against the light.

Barry came impulsively to her saddle horn, clasped his hands about the smooth old mahogany leather. Her own roughly gloved hands, holding the reins, rested upon them.

"I'm sorry!" he said, all little boy again. "I'll do anything you say." Her tired face brightened with a mother's smile.

"We'll talk about it again," she promised, almost at the limit of her endurance.

"Dearest, I've tired you!"

"No." She was going to cry, she was going to cry, she was going to cry, and it would be fatal to cry.

"You wonderful, wonderful woman!" he said. "To come down here and comfort your unsatisfactory, disappointing old boy, when all the world was against him! Kiss me, Barberry Bush."

Her beautiful, weary face, the exquisite mouth trembling a little, the black-fringed eyes, dark with unshed tears, stooped over his obediently.

"Don't worry about me, you've saved me!" he said. "I'll be fine, now. I'll stay here and read and rest, and Tomas and I'll go after abalone on the cliffs, and in a few days I'll press my suit, and shave, and come into town, and we'll settle everything."

"It'll all turn out right, Barry," she said, with death in her heart.

"I love you!" There were confidence, pride, devotion in the old words, reverentially said, emphasized with another kiss. He called the same phrase after her as she rode away.

CHAPTER XXVII

Morning came. Afternoon. Morning again. A quiet foggy afternoon and a mist-shrouded morning. It was autumn now, and although the noons were hot and still and flower-scented, dark came early, and lights were lighted on Amy's breakfast table.

"If I am good, it will all come out right," Barbara said. "The only thing is to be good, not to mind one's pride being hurt, not to hurt anybody."

She lay on the bed in Amy's spare room, where the new chintz curtains awaited hanging, and the new paper glowed with roses and twisted blue ribbons; she went downstairs to push aside untasted meals; she followed Amy to the sheltered side garden, where only a glimpse of their white skirts, or the sound of the children's voices, betrayed to the passers-by that they were sitting under the trees.

It was all strange and unreal. It was like walking through a dream.

Friday passed, Saturday passed. It was a warm, sleepy Sunday, and Barbara told herself that they must be at breakfast, for there were cornbread and bacon. Amy was talking resentfully of the staring at church. But what did staring matter? Somebody was suggesting that they sit out of doors, it was going to be hot. Later they would go for a drive.

"Dad, dear." This was Barbara herself speaking, in an odd, lifeless voice. "I saw Mrs Rudd yesterday. She hasn't been able to find anyone. So I'll probably go back to school tomorrow. It's really better to go on as if nothing had happened——"

She stopped on an uncertain note, looked at him steadily without expression, almost as if the words had no meaning for her, and went away, went slowly upstairs.

"Barberry, your heart's breaking—your heart's breaking!" Amy mourned, catching her in her arms, during the course of the long, slow morning.

"I don't think so." Barbara spoke carefully, gently, like a person who has been very ill.

"Dearest, can you get through it?"

"Minute by minute, perhaps." Her voice was hurt, puzzled. "What else, Amy, can I do?" she demanded simply.

Amy could make no reply. To have Barbara's castle in the dust, to have her return to boarding at the Duffys', and school teaching again, to have the beautiful rooms, the beautiful life, that had been awaiting her, empty, was almost too much for Amy to bear. What it must mean to her sister she dared not think.

Link came to see her; she raised heavy, troubled blue eyes to his, watching his face anxiously, while he talked, as if trying to follow him.

"We have to take every day for itself, Link. It's impossible to plan. Now I only feel so horribly—tired, so *broken,* all the time!"

She was to have been married on Thursday; now Friday and Saturday had come and gone dreamily, slowly. Barbara liked to have Amy's little baby in her arms; she was never far from Kate.

In the heat of the burning, perfect autumn Sunday morning she and Amy and the children were upstairs, in Barbara's room. Amy had been talking, desultorily, timidly, of the future, but her sister had not appeared to listen. Presently, Amy went away, carrying her baby off for his nap, and when she came back she brought Kate.

Kate had had an untimely mid-morning bath, and her rich black curls were damp. Her soft, dark little face glowed like a ripe apricot, her satiny little body, in the pale blue rompers, the pale blue socks, the pipe-clayed little ankle-strap slippers, was without flaw, from top to toe. The restless, perfect little hands, the firm baby legs, the way she planted her feet and narrowed her heavily fringed black eyes and worked her wild strawberry of a mouth were all characteristic of only one person in the world—of Kate. Already she was an entity: she was "my." "My" knew what she wanted, she was full of imperious wiles in getting it.

"Wipe my's tears dorf," she would command, in self-pity. "Dump my up! Dump my down!"

They were all Kate's slaves: Amy's servants, Ward, Kate's grandfather, everyone. The beautiful dark hair was brushed almost as often as it was kissed, the little body was bathed and powdered, the big plates of Kate's carefully apportioned cereals and vegetables and fruits were the supremely important question of the day.

Barbara had often dreamed of her future as the oldest child in the Mackenzie household. Kate with a baby brother. Kate at six, in pongee and sandals; Kate at ten, running off to school, under the elms. In blue jackets, blouses, and tams, in Russian cottons gay with red and black and yellow embroidery, in dancing-school pumps and Leghorn hats . . .

With Barry home again, the child's little fortune had suffered a bitter eclipse. Barbara, seating Kate beside her on the wide bed this morning, looked at her in sorrow and fear. What sort of a future was awaiting a child of Barry du Spain? Little Kate. Would she grow up in the dark hacienda kitchen, going with her mother to feed the chickens, picking up the little wisps of feathers and sea shells for toys, looking apprehensively at her father when he was angry, watching the varied activities of washing and cooking, sweeping and sewing, until she was old enough to share them? Would her life be much the same as that of the dark-eyed little Portuguese children at Tomas's humble, dark shanty?

"I mind for her," Barbara said to Amy with a restless twist of her body and a tired sigh.

"Mind?"

"Mind her name being associated with Barry far more than my own. You can stand anything yourself, Amy. But it's when you see your children deprived or suffering!"

Amy, as was usual, seemed to find nothing inspired to say. But one might always direct the conversation to Kate.

"She's exhausted, after that yelling spell," Amy commented, looking at the child. "She's going to sleep. What time did she have you awake this morning?"

"About dawn. About six, I imagine. She cried as if her little heart would break. She *is* going to sleep, the darling!" Barbara said. And then, with a radiant light in her violet-ringed, weary eyes: "Amy, this is the first time she's done this in ever so long—gone to sleep with her head against my arm."

"What difference the children make!" Amy mused. "How much freer you'd feel, without her, to live your own way—to settle this in the easiest way for you."

Barbara was musing, she nodded without moving her eyes from her lovely little gipsy face that was blind and unconscious in the curve of her arm.

"Odd how many mothers would say 'yes' to that," she answered, "and yet not one of them would give up a hair of a baby's head."

"Yes, that's true," Amy agreed. And she sat silent awhile, in the wicker chair, thinking.

"Peaceful up here! I wish I never had to leave this room," Barbara murmured.

"Listen! Ward's calling me—oh, dear, he'll wake them both up!" Amy, her ear tuned to hear the doctor's voice, in all his irregular comings and goings, said, bending her head sideways. She ran to the door, disappeared noiselessly through it, and closed it without sound. "He's got to *stop* that coming to the door and hissing my name!" Barbara heard her murmur, as she fled.

Then there was a long silence. Barbara thought idly that it must be a well-built house. Amy and Ward, and perhaps Ward's mother and Amy's father, were all probably in consultation in the sitting room or library. Yet not a sound penetrated to the quiet, orderly room where she lay, like a creature washed on to a beach, unable to move, waiting for the divinely healing powers of rest and sun to accomplish their work of regeneration.

That all four of these persons so vital to her happiness, and the closest of all, Link Mackenzie, had met just outside her door, with frightened and solemn faces, and were now no farther away than Amy's bedroom, she naturally could not dream. She would have been as amazed to identify the fifth person in the group as Tomas Bettancourt as they had been a few minutes before.

One raucous voice whispering steadily, in broken English; the others merely interjecting horrified ejaculations.

"Abalone Rock, eh?"

"My God—my God—my God——"

"Did he swim? Did he struggle?" This with gestures, and Tomas gesturing feverishly in answer.

"He must have slipped from the rock, Daddy. Nobody in the world could live five minutes in the wash below it. The water simply boils and seethes there." This was Amy, white-faced, aghast.

"Let's see the card again. He gave it to you last night?"

Then Tomas, with many a "'Sus Maria!" and much slipshod crossing of himself. "Meest' du Spain geeva da card lasta night." Tomas persisted. "Say, geeva da wife."

A pasteboard card, an irregular bit wrenched from a shoe box. Still pasted to it, a strip of bright green glazed paper. And penciled upon it little more than twoscore words, unsigned.

Barberry Bush, your bread-pudding future of real estate and pressed suits doesn't appeal. We can do better than that. You'll never know what a hit you made Thursday, coming to comfort me. You did the only thing that would have worked. Love.

"Daddy—was it—do you suppose—did he deliberately——"

"We oughtn't to say that, Amy, or even think it. Even if it were true——"

"Oh, you're right, Link! Even if it's true, we mustn't say it."

"My God, I can't believe it!"

"Poor boy—poor boy. We ought to send—as soon as she knows——"

"Link and I'll attend to all that, Professor. Poor Barbara, she's had more than her share of jolts."

"He *might* have slipped, really. It's frightfully slippery at low tide."

"We must say he did, to her and to the whole town. We must stick to it. I don't think we ought even to say that he sent the note in."

"You're quite right, Link!"

"Tomas says the face is quite untouched, but that the rocks——"

"Oh, don't!"

"She 'did the only thing that would have worked,' eh? That looks premeditated—but we aren't going to speculate. Poor boy, perhaps it was the happiest solution for him, after all," Professor Atherton mused. "She had made the peace with him—she had given him to understand he might win her back."

Strange silences, during which they all looked into space, with darkened eyes. Exclamations and broken comment; this aspect of it and then that. Ward solemn, Amy tearful, Link, with his head caught in his hands and his body bowed, muttering, "Oh, my God, my beautiful, my wonderful girl! My beautiful, wonderful girl!"

Lying flat on her bed, two rooms away, with one arm flung free to protect Kate's unconscious little body, Barbara could know nothing of this. She was on her back, her wide-open eyes, that had forgotten how to sleep, staring at the ceiling.

There was green light on the ceiling, from the tree branches outside the window. Church bells were ringing for eleven o'clock, and feet were chipping on the sidewalk, under the tree shadows.

Friendly Cottonwood was keeping the week's holy day. Church bells, drowsy in the soft, mid-morning heat, were ringing. And in every one of the comfortable homely houses, behind the gardens, were chicken and ice cream and chocolate cake. Fresh clothes, for Sunday. Company coming, for Sunday. Lowered voices and restrained games, for Sunday. The honking and chucking of small cars, loaded with holiday guests.

Peace came to Barbara's tired spirit, mysterious, illogical, quite without warning. She experienced one of those strange, exalted moments when life, on any terms, seems smooth and sweet, because of the exquisite and supernal harmony that possesses the innermost soul. It seemed good to her suddenly to be a young woman, healthy and beloved in quiet, happy Cottonwood. Barry, and money problems, and the heartache of love defrauded, all faded into insignificance in the swift clear glimpse of the larger scheme.

So infinitesimal—the pains and fears and disappointments of the individual soul! So marvelous, the opportunity to weave one's own microscopic bit of the great pattern firmly and faithfully.

"I believe I could sleep," she murmured, turning a little, and looking at the child's beautiful sleeping face, close to her own. "I'm a woman," Barbara mused. "I've suffered and wondered and blundered for all the twenty-five years of my life. But now at last—at last I think I've begun to learn how to live!

"And that, Kate," she finished, with a long weary sigh, lowering her thick, curled lashes upon her cheek almost as peacefully as the baby had, a few minutes before, "that's all that matters. That one should learn to live—without hate or resentment against those who hurt one, and without too much thought for one's own selfish will! Whoso loseth his life shall gain it, Kate.

"Tomorrow you and I are going to arise like giants refreshed. We are going to begin to lose our lives, my dear woman. And in God's time we shall begin to get them back again!"

MOTHER

IMPORTANT NOTE

This book is *not* a condensation or a digest of the original. It is the *complete* book.

INTRODUCTION

No collection of mine *would be complete without this story of home life, because it was my first book, and brought me millions of friends. Also because of the wonderful lost father and mother to whom I dedicated it, and to whose love and training I owe the fact that it could be written at all. And thirdly because it expresses my own profound conviction, growing only deeper with the years, that the world is slow in appreciating the glory and dignity and importance of motherhood, even when that motherhood must express itself in a shabby town, a dingy street, a dilapidated old house, a crowded kitchen. It was written first as a magazine story, later expanded to novelette size, and even now it finds new friends at Christmas time, or when some son or daughter is looking for a present for a mother's birthday.*

CHAPTER I

"Well, we couldn't have much worse weather than this for the last week of school, could we?" Margaret Paget said in discouragement. She stood at one of the school windows, her hands thrust deep in her coat pockets for warmth, her eyes following the whirling course of the storm that howled outside. The day had commenced with snow, but now, at twelve o'clock, the rain was falling in sheets, and the barren schoolhouse yard and the playshed roof ran muddy streams of water.

Margaret had taught in this schoolroom for nearly four years now, ever since her seventeenth birthday, and she knew every feature of the big bare room by heart, and every detail of the length of village street that the high, uncurtained windows commanded. She had stood at this window in all weathers: when locust and lilac made even ugly little Weston enchanting, and all the windows were open to floods of sweet spring air; when the dry heat of autumn burned over the world; when the common little houses and barns, and the bare trees, lay dazzling and transfigured under the first snowfall, and the wood crackled in the schoolroom stove; and when, as today, midwinter rains swept drearily past the windows, and the children must have the lights lighted for their writing lesson. She was tired of it all, with an utter and hopeless weariness. Tired of the bells, and the whispering, and the shuffling feet, of the books that smelled of pencil-dust and ink and little dusty fingers; tired of the blackboards, cleaned in great irregular scallops by small and zealous arms; of the clear-ticking big clock; of little girls who sulked, and little girls who cried after hours in the hall because they had lost their lunch baskets or their overshoes, and little girls who had colds in their heads, and no handkerchiefs. Looking out into the gray day and the rain, Margaret said to herself that she was *sick* of it all!

There were no little girls in the schoolroom now. They were for the most part downstairs in the big playroom, discussing cold lunches, and planning, presumably, the joys of the closely approaching holidays. One or two windows had been partially opened to air the room in their absence, and Margaret's only companion was another teacher, Emily Porter, a cheerful little widow, whose plain rosy face was in marked contrast to the younger woman's unusual beauty.

Mrs Porter loved Margaret and admired her very much, but she herself loved teaching. She had had a hard fight to secure this position a few years ago; it meant comfort to her and her children, and it still seemed to her a miracle of God's working, after her years of struggle

and worry. She could not understand why Margaret wanted anything better; what better thing indeed could life hold! Sometimes, looking admiringly at her associate's crown of tawny braids, at the dark eyes and the exquisite lines of mouth and forehead, Mrs Porter would find herself sympathetic with the girl's vague discontent and longings, to the extent of wishing that some larger social circle than that of Weston might have a chance to appreciate Margaret Paget's beauty, that "some of those painters who go crazy over girls not half as pretty" might see her. But, after all, sensible little Mrs Porter would say to herself, Weston was a "nice" town, only four hours from New York, absolutely up-to-date; and Weston's best people were all "nice," and the Paget girls were very popular, and "went everywhere,"—young people were just discontented and exacting, that was all!

She came to Margaret's side now, buttoned snugly into her own storm coat, and they looked out at the rain together. Nothing alive was in sight. The bare trees tossed in the wind, and a garden gate halfway down the row of little shabby cottages banged and banged.

"Shame—this is the worst yet!" Mrs Porter said. "You aren't going home to lunch in all this, Margaret?"

"Oh, I don't know," Margaret said despondently. "I'm so dead that I'd make a cup of tea here if I didn't think Mother would worry and send Julie over with lunch."

"I brought some bread and butter—but not much. I hoped it would hold up. I hate to leave Tom and Sister alone all day," Mrs Porter said dubiously. "There's tea and some of those bouillon cubes and some crackers left. But you're so tired, I don't know but what you ought to have a hearty lunch."

"Oh, I'm not hungry." Margaret dropped into a desk, put her elbows on it, pushed her hair off her forehead. The other woman saw a tear slip by the lowered, long lashes.

"You're exhausted, aren't you, Margaret?" she said suddenly.

The little tenderness was too much. Margaret's lip shook.

"Dead!" she said unsteadily. Presently she added, with an effort at cheerfulness, "I'm just cross, I guess, Emily; don't mind me! I'm tired out with examinations and"—her eyes filled again—"and I'm sick of wet cold weather and rain and snow," she added childishly. "Our house is full of muddy rubbers and wet clothes! Other people go places and do pleasant things," said Margaret, her breast rising and falling stormily; "but nothing ever happens to us except broken arms, and bills, and boilers bursting, and chicken-pox! It's drudge, drudge, drudge, from morning until night!"

With a sudden little gesture of abandonment she found a handkerchief in her belt, and pressed it, still folded, against her eyes. Mrs Porter watched her solicitously but silently. Outside the schoolroom windows the wind battered furiously, and rain slapped steadily against the panes.

"Well!" the girl said resolutely and suddenly. And after a moment, she

added frankly, "I think the real trouble today, Emily, is that we just heard of Betty Forsythe's engagement—she was my brother's girl, you know; he's admired her ever since she got into High School, and of course Bruce is going to feel awfully bad."

"Betty engaged? Who to?" Mrs Porter was interested.

"To that man—boy, rather, he's only twenty-one—who's been visiting the Redmans," Margaret said. "She's only known him two weeks."

"Gracious! And she's only eighteen——"

"Not quite eighteen. She and my sister, Julie, were in my first class four years ago; they're the same age," Margaret said. "She came fluttering over to tell us last night, wearing a diamond the size of a marble! Of course"—Margaret was loyal—"I don't think there's a jealous bone in Julie's body; still, it's pretty hard! Here's Julie plugging away to get through the Normal School, so that she can teach all the rest of her life, and Betty's been to California, and been to Europe, and now is going to marry a rich New York man! Betty's the only child, you know, so, of course, she has everything. It seems so unfair, for Mr Forsythe's salary is exactly what Dad's is; yet they can travel, and keep two maids, and entertain all the time! And as for family, why, Mother's family is one of the finest in the country, and Dad's had two uncles who were judges—and what were the Forsythes! However"—Margaret dried her eyes and put away her handkerchief—"however, it's for Bruce I mind most!"

"Bruce is only three years older than you are, twenty-three or four," Mrs Porter smiled.

"Yes, but he's not the kind that forgets!" Margaret's flush was a little resentful. "Oh, of course, you can laugh, Emily. I know that there are plenty of people who don't mind dragging along day after day, working and eating and sleeping—but I'm not that kind!" she went on moodily. "I used to hope that things would be different; it makes me sick to think how brave I was; but now here's Ju coming along and Ted growing up, and Bruce's girl throwing him over—it's all so *unfair!* I look at the Cutter girls, nearly fifty, and running the post-office for thirty years, and Mary Page in the Library, and the Norberrys painting pillows—and I could scream!"

"Things will take a turn for the better some day, Margaret," said the other woman, soothingly; "and as time goes on you'll find yourself getting more and more pleasure out of your work, as I do. Why, I've never been so securely happy in my life as I am now. You'll feel differently some day."

"Maybe," Margaret assented unenthusiastically. There was a pause. Perhaps the girl was thinking that to teach school, live in a plain little cottage on the unfashionable Bridge Road, take two roomers, and cook and sew and plan for Tom and little Emily, as Mrs Porter did, was not quite an ideal existence.

"You're an angel, anyway, Emily," said she, affectionately, a little shamefacedly. "Don't mind my growling. I don't do it very often. But I

look about at other people, and then realize how my mother's slaved for twenty years and how my father's been tied down, and I've come to the conclusion that while there may have been a time when a woman could keep a house, tend a garden, sew and spin and raise twelve children, things are different now; life is more complicated. You owe your husband something, you owe yourself something. I want to get on, to study and travel, to be a companion to my husband. I don't want to be a mere upper servant!"

"No, of course not," assented Mrs Porter vaguely, soothingly.

"Well, if we are going to stay here, I'll light the stove," Margaret said after a pause. "B-r-r-r! this room gets cold with the windows open! I wonder why Kelly doesn't bring us more wood?"

"I guess—I'll stay!" Mrs Porter said uncertainly, following her to the big book closet off the schoolroom, where a little gas stove and a small china closet occupied one wide shelf. The water for the tea and bouillon was put over the flame in a tiny enameled saucepan; they set forth on a fringed napkin crackers and sugar and spoons.

At this point a small girl of eleven with a brilliant, tawny head, and a wide and toothless smile, opened the door cautiously, and said, blinking rapidly with excitement——

"Mark, Mother theth pleath may thee come in?"

This was Rebecca, one of Margaret's five younger brothers and sisters, and a pupil of the school herself. Margaret smiled at the eager little face.

"Hello, darling! Is Mother here? Certainly she can! I believe"—she said, turning, suddenly radiant, to Mrs Porter—"I'll just *bet you* she's brought us some lunch!"

"Thee brought uth our luncheth—eggth and thpith caketh and everything!" exulted Rebecca, vanishing, and a moment later Mrs Paget appeared.

She was a tall woman, slender but large of build, and showing, under a shabby raincoat and well pinned-up skirt, the gracious generous lines of shoulders and hips, the deep-bosomed erect figure that is rarely seen except in old daguerreotypes, or the ideal of some artist two generations ago. The storm today had blown an unusual color into her thin cheeks, her bright, deep eyes were like Margaret's, but the hair that once had shown an equally golden luster was dull and smooth now, and touched with gray. She came in smiling, and a little breathless.

"Mother, you didn't come out in all this rain just to bring us our lunches!" Margaret protested, kissing the cold, fresh face.

"Well, look at the lunch you silly girls were going to eat!" Mrs Paget protested in turn, in a voice rich with amusement. "I love to walk in the rain, Mark; I used to love it when I was a girl. Tom and Sister are at our house, Mrs Porter, playing with Duncan and Baby. I'll keep them until after school, then I'll send them over to walk home with you."

"Oh, you are an angel!" said the younger mother, gratefully. And

"You *are* an angel, Mother!" Margaret echoed, as Mrs Paget opened a shabby suitcase, and took from it a large jar of hot rich soup, a little blue bowl of stuffed eggs, half a fragrant whole-wheat loaf in a white napkin, a little glass full of sweet butter, and some of the spice cakes to which Rebecca had already enthusiastically alluded.

"There!" said she, pleased with their delight, "now take your time, you've got three quarters of an hour. Julie deviled the eggs, and the sweet-butter man happened to come just as I was starting."

"Delicious! You've saved our lives," Margaret said, busy with cups and spoons. "You'll stay, Mother?" she broke off suddenly, as Mrs Paget closed the suitcase.

"I can't, dear! I must go back to the children," her mother said cheerfully. No coaxing proving of any avail, Margaret went with her to the top of the hall stairs.

"What's my girl worrying about?" Mrs Paget asked, with a keen glance at Margaret's face.

"Oh, nothing!" Margaret used both hands to button the top button of her mother's coat. "I was hungry and cold, and I didn't want to walk home in the rain!" she confessed, raising her eyes to the eyes so near her own.

"Well, go back to your lunch," Mrs Paget urged, after a brief pause, not quite satisfied with the explanation. Margaret kissed her again, watched her descend the stairs, and leaning over the banister called down to her softly:

"Don't worry about *me*, Mother!"

"No—no—no!" her mother called back brightly. Indeed, Margaret reflected, going back to the much-cheered Emily, it was not in her nature to worry.

No, Mother never worried, or if she did, nobody ever knew it. Care, fatigue, responsibility, hard long years of busy days and broken nights had left their mark on her face; the old beauty that had been hers was chiseled to a mere pure outline now; but there was a contagious serenity in Mrs Paget's smile, a clear steadiness in her calm eyes, and her forehead, beneath an unfashionably plain sweep of hair, was untroubled and smooth.

The children's mother was a simple woman; so absorbed in the hourly problems attendant upon the housing and feeding of her husband and family that her own personal ambitions, if she had any, were quite lost sight of, and the actual outlines of her character were forgotten by every one, herself included. If her busy day marched successfully to nightfall; if darkness found her husband reading in his big chair, the younger children sprawled safe and asleep in the shabby nursery, the older ones contented with books or games, the clothes sprinkled, the bread set, the kitchen dark and clean; Mrs Paget asked no more of life. She would sit, her overflowing work basket beside her, looking from one absorbed face to another, thinking perhaps of Julie's new school dress, of Ted's im-

pending siege with the dentist, or of the old bureau up attic that might be mended for Bruce's room. "Thank God we have all warm beds," she would say, when they all went upstairs, yawning and chilly.

She had married, at twenty, the man she loved, and had found him better than her dreams in many ways, and perhaps disappointing in some few others, but "the best man in the world" for all that. That for more than twenty years he had been satisfied to stand for nine hours daily behind one dingy desk, and to carry home to her his unopened salary envelope twice a month, she found only admirable. Daddy was "steady," he was "so gentle with the children," he was "the easiest man in the world to cook for." "Bless his heart, no woman ever had less to worry over in her husband!" she would say, looking from her kitchen window to the garden where he trained the pea-vines, with the children's yellow heads bobbing about him. She never analyzed his character, much less criticized him. Good and bad, he was taken for granted; she was much more lenient to him than to any of the children. She welcomed the fast-coming babies as gifts from God, marveled over their tiny perfectness, dreamed over the soft relaxed little forms with a heart almost too full for prayer. She was, in a word, old-fashioned, hopelessly out of the modern current of thoughts and events. She secretly regarded her children as marvelous, even while she laughed down their youthful conceit and punished their naughtiness.

Thinking a little of all these things, as a girl with her own wifehood and motherhood all before her does think, Margaret went back to her hot luncheon. One o'clock found her at her desk, refreshed in spirit by her little outburst, and much fortified in body. The room was well aired, and a reinforced fire roared in the little stove. One of the children had brought her a spray of pine, and the spicy fragrance of it reminded her that Christmas and the Christmas vacation were near; her mind was pleasantly busy with anticipation of the play that the Pagets always wrote and performed some time during the holidays, and with the New Year's costume dance at the Hall, and a dozen lesser festivities.

Suddenly, in the midst of a droning spelling lesson, there was a jarring interruption. From the world outside came a child's shrill screaming, which was instantly drowned in a chorus of frightened voices, and in the schoolroom below her own Margaret heard a thundering rush of feet, and answering screams. With a suffocating terror at her heart she ran to the window, followed by every child in the room.

The rain had stopped now, and the sky showed a pale, cold, yellow light low in the west. At the schoolhouse gate an immense limousine car had come to a stop. The driver, his face alone visible between a great leather coat and visored leather cap, was talking unheard above the din. A tall woman, completely enveloped in sealskins, had evidently jumped from the limousine, and now held in her arms what made Margaret's heart turn sick and cold, the limp figure of a small girl.

About these central figures there surged the terrified crying small children of the just-dismissed primer class, and in the half moment that Margaret watched, Mrs Porter, white and shaking, and another teacher, Ethel Elliot, an always excitable girl, who was now sobbing and chattering hysterically, ran out from the school, each followed by her own class of crowding and excited boys and girls.

With one horrified exclamation, Margaret ran downstairs, and out to the gate. Mrs Porter caught at her arm as she passed her in the path.

"Oh, my God, Margaret! It's poor little Dorothy Scott!" she said. "They've killed her. The car went completely over her!"

"Oh, Margaret, don't go near, oh, how can you!" screamed Miss Elliot. "Oh, and she's all they have! Who'll tell her mother!"

With astonishing ease, for the children gladly recognized authority, Margaret pushed through the group to the motor car.

"Stop screaming—stop that shouting at once—keep still, every one of you!" she said angrily, shaking various shoulders as she went with such good effect that the voice of the woman in sealskins could be heard by the time Margaret reached her.

"I don't think she's badly hurt!" said this woman, nervously and eagerly. She was evidently badly shaken, and was very white. "Do quiet them, can't you?" she said, with a sort of apprehensive impatience. "Can't we take her somewhere, and get a doctor? Can't we get out of this?"

Margaret took the child in her own arms. Little Dorothy roared afresh, but to Margaret's unspeakable relief she twisted about and locked her arms tightly about the loved teacher's neck. The other woman watched them anxiously.

"That blood on her frock's just nosebleed," she said; "but I think the car went over her! I assure you we were running very slowly. How it happened——! But I don't think she was struck."

"Nosebleed!" Margaret echoed, with a great breath. "No," she said quietly, over the agitated little head; "I don't think she's much hurt. We'll take her in. Now, look here, children," she added loudly to the assembled pupils of the Weston Grammar School, whom mere curiosity had somewhat quieted, "I want every one of you children to go back to your schoolrooms; do you understand? Dorothy's had a bad scare, but she's got no bones broken, and we're going to have a doctor see that she's all right. I want you to see how quiet you can be. Mrs Porter, may my class go into your room a little while?"

"Certainly," said Mrs Porter, eager to coöperate, and much relieved to have her share of the episode take this form. "Form lines, children," she added calmly.

"Ted," said Margaret to her own small brother, who was one of Mrs Porter's pupils, and who had edged closer to her than any boy unprivileged by relationship dared, "will you go down the street, and ask old Doctor Potts to come here? And then go tell Dorothy's mother that

Dorothy has had a little bump, and that Miss Paget says she's all right, but that she'd like her mother to come for her."

"Sure I will, Mark!" Theodore responded enthusiastically, departing on a run.

"Mama!" sobbed the little sufferer at this point, hearing a familiar word.

"Yes, darling, you want Mama, don't you?" Margaret said soothingly, as she started with her burden up the schoolhouse steps. "What were you doing, Dorothy," she went on pleasantly, "to get under that big car?"

"I dropped my ball!" wailed the small girl, her tears beginning afresh, "and it rolled and rolled. And I didn't see the automobile, and I *didn't* see it! And I fell down and b-b-bumped my nose!"

"Well, I should think you did!" Margaret said, laughing. "Mother won't know you at all with such a muddy face and such a muddy apron!"

Dorothy laughed shakily at this, and several other little girls, passing in orderly file, laughed heartily. Margaret crossed the lines of children to the room where they played and ate their lunches on wet days. She shut herself in with the child and the fur-clad lady.

"Now you're all right!" said Margaret, gayly. And Dorothy was presently comfortable in a big chair, wrapped in a rug from the motor car, with her face washed, and her head dropped languidly back against her chair, as became an interesting invalid. The Irish janitor was facetious as he replenished the fire, and made her laugh again. Margaret gave her a numerical chart to play with, and saw with satisfaction that the little head was bent interestedly over it.

Quiet fell upon the school; the muffled sound of lessons recited in concert presently reached them. Theodore returned, reporting that the doctor would come as soon as he could and that Dorothy's mother was away at a card party, but that Dorothy's "girl" would come for her as soon as the bread was out of the oven. There was nothing to do but wait.

"It seems a miracle," said the strange lady, in a low tone, when she and Margaret were alone again with the child. "But I don't believe she was scratched!"

"I don't think so," Margaret agreed. "Mother says no child who can cry is very badly hurt."

"They made such a horrible noise," said the other, sighing wearily. She passed a white hand, with one or two blazing great stones upon it, across her forehead. Margaret had leisure now to notice that by all signs this was a very great lady indeed. The quality of her furs, the glimpse of her gown that the loosened coat showed, her rings, and most of all the tones of her voice, the authority of her manner, the well-groomed hair and skin and hands, all marked the thoroughbred.

"Do you know that you managed that situation very cleverly just now?" said the lady, with a keen glance that made Margaret color. "One has such a dread of the crowd, just public sentiment, you know. Some

officious bystander calls the police, they crowd against your driver, perhaps a brick gets thrown. We had an experience in England once——" She paused, then interrupted herself. "But I don't know your name?" she said brightly.

Margaret supplied it, was led to talk a little of her own people.

"Seven of you, eh? Seven's too many," said the visitor, with the assurance that Margaret was to learn characterized her. "I've two myself, two girls," she went on. "I wanted a boy, but they're nice girls. And you've six brothers and sisters? Are they all as handsome as you and this Teddy of yours? And why do you like teaching?"

"Why do I like it?" Margaret said, enjoying these confidences and the unusual experience of sitting idle in mid-afternoon. "I don't, I hate it."

"I see. But then why don't you come down to New York, and do something else?" the other woman asked.

"I'm needed at home, and I don't know any one there," Margaret said simply.

"I see," the lady said again thoughtfully. There was a pause. Then the same speaker said reminiscently, "I taught school once for three months when I was a girl, to show my father I could support myself."

"I've taught for four years," Margaret said.

"Well, if you ever want to try something else—there are such lots of fascinating things a girl can do now—be sure you come and see me about it," the stranger said. "I am Mrs Carr-Boldt, of New York."

Margaret's amazed eyes flashed to Mrs Carr-Boldt's face; her cheeks crimsoned.

"Mrs Carr-Boldt!" she echoed blankly.

"Why not?" smiled the lady, not at all displeased.

"Why," stammered Margaret, laughing and rosy, "why, nothing—only I never dreamed who you were!" she finished, a little confused.

And indeed it never afterward seemed to her anything short of a miracle that brought the New York society woman—famed on two continents and from ocean to ocean for her jewels, her entertainments, her gowns, her establishments—into a Weston schoolroom, and into Margaret Paget's life.

"I was on my way to New York now," said Mrs Carr-Boldt.

"I don't see why you should be delayed," Margaret said, glad to be able to speak normally, with such a fast-beating and pleasantly excited heart. "I'm sure Dorothy's all right."

"Oh, I'd rather wait. I like my company," said the other. And Margaret decided in that instant that there never was a more deservedly admired and copied and quoted woman.

Presently their chat was interrupted by the tramp of the departing school children; the other teachers peeped in, were reassured, and went their ways. Then came the doctor, to pronounce the entirely cheerful Dorothy unhurt, and to bestow upon her some hoarhound drops. Mrs

Carr-Boldt settled at once with the doctor, and when Margaret saw the size of the bill that was pressed into his hand, she realized that she had done her old friend a good turn.

"Use it up on your poor people," said Mrs Carr-Boldt, to his protestations; and when he had gone, and Dorothy's "girl" appeared, she tipped that worthy and amazed Teuton, and after promising Dorothy a big doll from a New York shop, sent the child and maid home in the motor car.

"I hope this hasn't upset your plans," Margaret said, as they stood waiting in the doorway. It was nearly five o'clock, the school was empty and silent.

"No, not exactly. I had hoped to get home for dinner. But I think I'll get Woolcock to take me back to Dayton; I've some very dear friends there who'll give me a cup of tea. Then I'll come back this way and get home, by ten, I should think, for a late supper." Then, as the limousine appeared, Mrs Carr-Boldt took both Margaret's hands in hers, and said, "And now good-by, my dear girl. I've got your address, and I'm going to send you something pretty to remember me by. You saved me from I don't know what annoyance and publicity. And don't forget that when you come to New York I'm going to help you meet the people you want to, and give you a start if I can. You're far too clever and good-looking to waste your life down here. Good-by!"

"Good-by!" Margaret said, her cheeks brilliant, her head awhirl.

She stood unmindful of the chilly evening air, watching the great motor car wheel and slip into the gloom. The rain was over; a dying wind moaned mysteriously through the dusk. Margaret went slowly upstairs, pinned on her hat, buttoned her long coat snugly about her. She locked the schoolroom door, and, turning the corner, plunged her hands into her pockets, and faced the wind bravely. Deepening darkness and coldness were about her, but she felt surrounded by the warmth and brightness of her dreams. She saw the brilliant streets of a big city, the carriages and motor cars coming and going, the idle, lovely women in their sumptuous gowns and hats. These things were real, near—almost attainable—tonight.

"Mrs Carr-Boldt!" Margaret said, "the darling! I wonder if I'll ever see her again!"

CHAPTER II

Life in the shabby, commonplace house that sheltered the Paget family sometimes really did seem to proceed, as Margaret had suggested, in a long chain of violent shocks, narrow escapes, and closely averted catastrophes. No sooner was Duncan's rash pronounced not to be scarlet fever than Robert swallowed a penny, or Beck set fire to the dining-room waste-basket, or Dad foresaw the immediate failure of the Weston Home Savings Bank, and the inevitable loss of his position there. Some-

times there was a paternal explosion because Bruce liked to murmur vaguely of "dandy chances in Manila," or because Julie, pretty, excitable, and sixteen, had an occasional dose of stage fever, and would stammer desperately between convulsive sobs that she wasn't half as much afraid of "the terrible temptations of the life" as she was afraid of dying a poky old maid in Weston. In short, the home was crowded, the Pagets were poor, and every one of the seven possessed a spirited and distinct entity. All the mother's effort could not keep them always contented. Growing ambitions made the Weston horizon seem narrow and mean, and the young eyes that could not see beyond tomorrow were often wet with rebellious tears.

Through it all they loved each other; sometimes whole weeks went by in utter harmony; the children contented over "Parches" on the hearth-rug in the winter evenings, Julie singing in the morning sunlight, as she filled the vases from the shabby marguerite bushes on the lawn. But there were other times when to the dreamy studious Margaret the home circle seemed all discord, all ugly dinginess and threadbareness; the struggle for ease and beauty and refinement seemed hopeless and overwhelming. In these times she would find herself staring thoughtfully at her mother's face, bent over the mending basket, or her eyes would leave the chessboard that held her father's attention so closely, and move from his bald spot, with its encircling crown of fluffy gray, to his rosy face, with its kind, intent blue eyes and the little lines about his mouth that his mustache didn't hide—with a half-formed question in her heart. What hadn't they done, these dearest people, to be always struggling, always tired, always "behind the game"? Why should they be eternally harassed by plumber's bills, and dentists' bills, and shoes that would wear out, and school-books that must be bought? Why weren't they holding their place in Weston society, the place to which they were entitled by right of the Quincy grandfather, and the uncles who were judges?

And in answer Margaret came despondently to the decision, "If you have children, you never have anything else!" How could Mother keep up with her friends, when for some fifteen years she had been far too busy to put on a dainty gown in the afternoon, and serve a hospitable cup of tea on the east porch? Mother was buttering bread for supper, then; opening little beds and laying out little nightgowns, starting Ted off for the milk, washing small hands and faces, soothing bumps and binding cuts, admonishing, praising, directing. Mother was only too glad to sink wearily into her rocker after dinner, and, after a few spirited visits to the rampant nursery upstairs, express the hope that nobody would come in tonight. Gradually the friends dropped away, and the social life of Weston flowed smoothly on without the Pagets.

But when Margaret began to grow up, she grasped the situation with all the keenness of a restless and ambitious nature. Weston, detested Weston, it must apparently be. Very well, she would make the best of Weston. Margaret called on her mother's old friends; she was tireless

in charming little attentions. Her own first dances had not been successful; she and Bruce were not good dancers, Margaret had not been satisfied with her gowns, they both felt out of place. When Julie's dancing days came along, Margaret saw to it that everything was made much easier. She planned social evenings at home, and exhausted herself preparing for them, that Julie might know the "right people." To her mother all people were alike, if they were kind and not vulgar; Margaret felt very differently. It was a matter of the greatest satisfaction to her when Julie blossomed into a fluffy-haired butterfly, tremendously in demand, in spite of much-cleaned slippers and often-pressed frocks. Margaret arranged Christmas theatricals, May picnics, Fourth of July gatherings. She never failed Bruce when this dearest brother wanted her company; she was, as Mrs Paget told her over and over, "the sweetest daughter any woman ever had." But deep in her heart she knew moods of bitter distaste and restlessness. The struggle did not seem worth the making; the odds against her seemed too great.

Still dreaming in the winter dark, she went through the home gate, and up the porch steps of a roomy, cheap house that had been built in the era of scalloped and pointed shingles, of colored glass embellishments around the window-panes, of perforated scroll work and wooden railings in Grecian designs. A mass of wet overshoes lay on the porch, and two or three of the weather-stained porch rockers swayed under the weight of spread wet raincoats. Two opened umbrellas wheeled in the current of air that came around the house; the porch ran water. While Margaret was adding her own rainy-day equipment to the others, a golden-brown setter, one ecstatic wriggle from nose to tail, flashed into view, and came fawning to her feet.

"Hello, Bran!" Margaret said, propping herself against the house with one hand, while she pulled at a tight overshoe. "Hello, old fellow! Well, did they lock him out?"

She let herself and a freezing gust of air into the dark hall, groping to the hat-rack for matches. While she was lighting the gas, a very pretty girl of sixteen, with crimson cheeks and tumbled soft dark hair, came to the dining-room door. This was her sister Julie, Margaret's roommate and warmest admirer, and for the last year or two her inseparable companion. Julie had her finger in a book, but now she closed it, and said affectionately between her yawns: "Come in here, darling! You must be dead."

"Don't let Bran in," cried some one from upstairs.

"He *is* in, Mother!" Margaret called back, and Rebecca and the three small boys—Theodore, the four-year-old baby, Robert, and Duncan, a grave little lad of seven—all rushed out of the dining-room together, shouting, as they fell on the delighted dog:

"Aw, leave him in! Aw, leave the poor little feller in! *Come* on, Bran, come on, old feller! Leave him in, Mark, can't we?"

Kissing and hugging the dog, and stumbling over each other and over him, they went back to the dining-room which was warm and stuffy. A coal fire was burning low in the grate, the window-panes were beaded, and the little boys had marked their initials in the steam. They had also pushed the fringed table-cover almost off, and scattered the contents of a box of "Lotto" over the scarred walnut top. The room was shabby, ugly, comfortable. Julie and Margaret had established a tea-table in the bay window, had embroidered a cover for the wide couch, had burned the big wooden bowl that was supposedly always full of nuts or grapes or red apples. But these touches were lost in the mass of less pleasing detail. The "body Brussels" carpet was worn, the wall paper depressing, the woodwork was painted dark brown, with an imitation burl smeared in by the painter's thumb. The chairs were of several different woods and patterns, the old black walnut sideboard clumsy and battered. About the fire stood some comfortable worn chairs. Margaret dropped wearily into one of these, and the dark-eyed Julie hung over her with little affectionate attentions. The children returned to their game.

"Well, what a time you had with little Dolly Scott!" said Julie, sympathetically. "Ted's been getting it all mixed up! Tell us about it. Poor old Mark, you're all in, aren't you? Mark, would you like a cup of tea?"

"Love it!" Margaret said, a little surprised, for this luxury was not common.

"And toast—we'll toast it!" said Theodore, enthusiastically.

"No, no—no tea!" said Mrs Paget, coming in at this point with some sewing in her hands. "Don't spoil your dinner, now, Mark dear; tea doesn't do you any good. And I think Blanche is saving the cream for an apple tapioca. Theodore, Mother wants you to go right downstairs for some coal, dear. And, Julie, you'd better start your table; it's close to six. Put up the game, Rebecca!"

There was general protest. Duncan, it seemed, needed only "two more" to win. Little Robért, who was benevolently allowed by the other children to play the game exactly as he pleased, screamed delightedly that he needed only *one* more, and showed a card upon which even the blank spaces were lavishly covered with glass. He was generously conceded the victory, and kissed by Rebecca and Julie as he made his way to his mother's lap.

"Why, this can't be Robert Paget!" said Mrs Paget, putting aside her sewing to gather him in her arms. "Not this great, big boy!"

"Yes, I *am!*" the little fellow asserted joyously, dodging her kisses.

"Good to get home!" Margaret said luxuriously.

"You must sleep late in the morning," her mother commanded affectionately.

"Yes, because you have to be fresh for the party Monday!" exulted Julie. She had flung a white cloth over the long table, and was putting the ringed napkins down with rapid bangs. "And New Year's Eve's the dance!" she went on buoyantly. "I just love Christmas, anyway!"

"Rebecca, ask Blanche if she needs me," that was Mother.

"You'd go perfectly crazy about her, Ju, she's the most fascinating, and the most *unaffected* woman!" Margaret was full of the day's real event.

"And Mother theth that Ted and Dunc and I can have our friendth in on the day after Chrithmath to thee the Chrithmath tree!" That was Rebecca, who added, "Blanche theth no, Mother, unleth you want to make thom cream gravy for the chopth!"

"And, Mark, Eleanor asked if Bruce and you and I weren't going as Pierrot and Pierettes; she's simply *crazy* to find out!" This was Julie again; and then Margaret, coaxingly, "Do make cream gravy for Bruce, Mother. Give Baby to me!" and little Robert's elated "I know *three* things Becky's going to get for Christmas, Mark!"

"Well, I think I will, there's milk," Mrs Paget conceded, rising. "Put Bran out, Teddy; or put him in the laundry if you want to, while we have dinner." Margaret presently followed her mother into the kitchen, stopping in a crowded passageway to tie an apron over her school gown.

"Bruce come in yet?" she said in a low voice.

Her mother flashed her a sympathetic look.

"I don't believe he's coming, Mark."

"*Isn't!* Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother, does he feel so badly about Betty?"

"I suppose so!" Mrs Paget went on with her bread cutting.

"But, Mother, surely he didn't expect to *marry* Betty Forsythe?"

"I don't know why not, Mark. She's a sweet little thing."

"But, Mother——" Margaret was a little at a loss. "We don't seem old enough to really be getting married!" she said, a little lamely.

"Brucie came in about half-past five, and said he was going over to Richie's," Mrs Paget said, with a sigh.

"In all this rain—that long walk!" Margaret ejaculated, as she filled a long wicker basket with sliced bread.

"I think an evening of work with Richie will do him a world of good," said his mother. There was a pause. "There's Dad. I'll go in," she said, suddenly ending it, as the front door slammed.

Margaret went in, too, to kiss her father, a tired-looking, gray-haired man close to fifty, who had taken her chair by the fire. Mrs Paget was anxious to be assured that his shoulders and shoes were not damp.

"But your hands are icy, Daddy," said she, as she sat down behind a smoking tureen at the head of the table. "Come, have your nice hot soup, dear. Pass that to Dad, Becky, and light the other gas. What sort of a day?"

"A hard day," said Mr Paget, heavily. "Here, one of you girls put Baby into his chair. Let go, Bob—I'm too tired tonight for monkey-shines!" He sat down stiffly. "Where's Bruce? Can't that boy remember what time we have dinner?"

"Bruce is going to have supper with Richie Williams, Dad," said Mrs Paget, serenely. "They'll get out their blue prints afterward and have a good evening's work. Fill the glasses before you sit down, Ju. Come,

Ted—put that back on the mantel. Come, Becky! Tell Daddy about what happened today, Mark——"

They all drew up their chairs. Robert, recently graduated from a high chair, was propped upon "The Officers of the Civil War" and "The Household Book of Verse." Julie tied on his bib, and kissed the back of his fat little neck before she slipped into her own seat. The mother sat between Ted and Duncan, for reasons that immediately became obvious. Margaret sat by her father, and attended to his needs, telling him all about the day, and laying her pretty slim hand over his as it rested beside his plate. The chops and cream gravy, as well as a mountain of baked potatoes, and various vegetables, were under discussion, when every one stopped short in surprise at hearing the doorbell ring.

"Who——?" said Margaret, turning puzzled brows to her mother, and "I'm sure I——" her mother answered, shaking her head. Ted was heard to mutter uneasily that, gee, maybe it was old Pembroke, mad because the fellers had soaked his old skate with snowballs; Julie dimpled and said, "Maybe it's flowers!" Robert shouted "Bakeryman!" more because he had recently acquired the word than because of any conviction on the subject. In the end Julie went to the door, with the four children in her wake. When she came back, she looked bewildered, and the children a little alarmed.

"It's—it's Mrs Carr-Boldt, Mother," said Julie.

"Well, don't leave her standing there in the cold, dear!" Mrs Paget said, rising quickly, to go into the hall. Margaret, her heart thumping with an unanalyzed premonition of something pleasant, and nervous, too, for the hospitality of the Pagets, followed her. So they were all presently crowded into the hall, Mrs Paget all hospitality, Margaret full of a fear she would have denied that her mother would not be equal to the occasion, the children curious, Julie a little embarrassed.

The visitor, fur-clad, rain-spattered—for it was raining again—and beaming, stretched a hand to Mrs Paget.

"You're Mrs Paget, of course—this is an awful hour to interrupt you," she said in her big, easy way, "and there's my Miss Paget—how do you do? But you see I must get up to town tonight—in this door? I can see perfectly, thank you—and I did want a little talk with you first. Now, what a shame!"—for the gas, lighted by Theodore at this point, revealed Duncan's bib, and the napkins some of the others were still carrying. "I've interrupted your dinner! Won't you let me wait here until——"

"Perhaps—if you haven't had your supper—you will have some with us," said Mrs Paget, a little uncertainly. Margaret inwardly shuddered, but Mrs Carr-Boldt was gracious.

"Mrs Paget, that's charming of you," she said. "But I had tea at Dayton, and mustn't lose another moment. I shan't dine until I get home. I'm the busiest woman in the world, you know. Now, it won't take me two minutes——"

She was seated now, her hands still deep in her muff, for the parlor was freezing cold. Mrs Paget, with a rather bewildered look, sat down, too.

"You can run back to your dinners," said she to the children. "Take them, Julie. Mark, dear, will you help the pudding?" They all filed dutifully out of the room, and Margaret, excited and curious, continued a meal that might have been of sawdust and sand for all she knew. The strain did not last long; in about ten minutes Mrs Paget looked into the room, with a rather worried expression, and said, a little breathlessly: "Daddy, can you come here a moment?—You're all right, dear," she added, as Mr Paget indicated with an embarrassed gesture his well-worn house-coat. They went out together. The young people sat almost without speaking, listening to the indistinguishable murmur from the adjoining room, and smiling mysteriously at each other. Then Margaret was called, and went as far as the dining-room door, and came back to put her napkin uncertainly at her place, hesitated, arranged her gown carefully, and finally went out again. They heard her voice with the others in the parlor . . . questioning . . . laughing . . .

Presently the low murmur broke into audible farewells; chairs were pushed back, feet scraped in the hall.

"Good-night, then!" said Mrs Carr-Boldt's clear tones, "and *so* sorry to have—— Good-night, Mr Paget!—Oh, thank you—but I'm well wrapped. Thank you! Good-night, dear! I'll see you again soon—I'll write."

And then came the honking of the motor car, and a great swish where it grazed a wet bush near the house. Somebody lowered the gas in the hall, and Mrs Paget's voice said regretfully, "I wish we had had a fire in the parlor—just one of the times!—but there's no help for it." They all came in, Margaret flushed, starry-eyed; her father and mother a little serious. The three blinked at the brighter light, and fell upon the cooling chops as if eating were the important business of the moment.

"We waited the pudding," said Julie. "What *is* it?"

"Why——" Mrs Paget began, hesitatingly. Mr Paget briskly took the matter out of her hands.

"This lady," he said, with an air of making any further talk unnecessary, "needs a secretary, and she has offered your sister Margaret the position. That's the whole affair in a nutshell. I'm not at all sure that your mother and I think it a wise offer for Margaret to accept, and I want to say here and now that I don't want any child of mine to speak of this matter, or make it a matter of general gossip in the neighborhood. Mother, I'd like very much to have Blanche make me a fresh cup of tea."

"Wants Margaret!" gasped Julie, unaffected—so astonishing was the news—by her father's unusual sternness. "Oh, Mother! Oh, Mark! Oh, you lucky thing! When is she coming down here?"

"She isn't coming down here—she wants Mark to go to her—that's it," said her mother.

"Mark—in New York!" shrilled Theodore. Julie got up to rush around the table and kiss her sister; the younger children laughed and shouted.

"There is no occasion for all this," said Mr Paget, but mildly, for the fresh tea had arrived. "Just quiet them down, will you, Mother? I see nothing very extraordinary in the matter. This Mrs—Mrs Carr-Boldt—is it?—needs a secretary and companion; and she offers the position to Mark."

"But—but she never even *saw* Mark until today!" marveled Julie.

"I hardly see how that affects it, my dear!" her father observed unenthusiastically.

"Why, I think it makes it simply extraordinary!" exulted the generous little sister. "Oh, Mark, isn't this just the sort of thing you would have *wished* to happen! Secretary work—just what you love to do! And you, with your beautiful handwriting, you'll just be *invaluable* to her! And your German—and I'll bet you'll just have them all *adoring* you——!"

"Oh, Ju, if I only can do it!" burst from Margaret, with a little childish gasp. She was sitting back from the table, twisted about so that she sat sideways, her hands clasped about the top bar of her chair-back. Her tawny soft hair was loosened about her face, her dark eyes aflame. "Lenox, she said," Margaret went on dazedly; "and Europe, and traveling everywhere! And a hundred dollars a month, and nothing to spend it on, so I can still help out here! Why, it—I can't believe it!"—she looked from one smiling interested face to another, and suddenly her radiance underwent a quick eclipse. Her lip trembled, and she tried to laugh as she pushed her chair back, and ran to the arms her mother opened. "Oh, Mother!" sobbed Margaret, clinging there, "do you want me to go—shall I go? I've always been so happy here, and I feel so ashamed of being discontented—and I don't deserve a thing like this to happen to me!"

"Why, God bless her heart!" said Mrs Paget, tenderly; "of course you'll go!"

"Oh, you silly! I'll never speak to you again if you don't!" laughed Julie, through sympathetic tears.

Theodore and Duncan immediately burst into a radiant reminiscence of their one brief visit to New York; Rebecca was heard to murmur that she would "vithet Mark thome day"; and the baby, tugging at his mother's elbow, asked sympathetically if Mark was naughty, and was caught between his sister's and his mother's arms and kissed by them both. Mr Paget, picking his paper from the floor beside his chair, took an armchair by the fire, stirred the coals noisily, and while cleaning his glasses, observed rather huskily that the little girl always knew she could come back again if anything went wrong.

"But suppose *I* don't suit?" suggested Margaret, sitting back on her

heels, refreshed by tears, and with her arms laid across her mother's lap.

"Oh, you'll *suit*," said Julie, confidently; and Mrs Paget smoothed the girl's hair back and said affectionately, "I don't think she'll find many girls like you for the asking, Mark!"

"Reading English with the two little girls," said Margaret, dreamily, "and answering notes and invitations. And keeping books——"

"You can do that anyway," said her father over his paper.

"And dinner lists, you know, Mother—doesn't it sound like an English story!" Margaret stopped in the middle of an ecstatic wriggle. "Mother, will you *pray* I succeed?" she said solemnly.

"Just be your own dear simple self, Mark," her mother advised. "January!" she added, with a great sigh. "It's the first break, isn't it, Dad? Think of trying to get along without our Mark!"

"January!" Julie was instantly alert. "Why, but you'll need all *sorts* of clothes!"

"Oh, she says there's a sewing woman always in the house," Margaret said, almost embarrassed by the still-unfolding advantages of the proposition. "I can have her do whatever's left over." Her father lowered his paper to give her a shrewd glance.

"I suppose somebody knows something about this Mrs Carr-Boldt, Mother?" asked he. "She's all right, I suppose?"

"Oh, Dad, her name's *always* in the papers," Julie burst out; and the mother smiled as she said, "We'll be pretty sure of everything before we let our Mark go!" Later, when the children had been dismissed and he himself was going, rather stiffly, toward the stairs, Mr Paget again voiced a mild doubt.

"There was a perfectly good reason for her hurry, I suppose? Old secretary deserted—got married——? She had good reason for wanting Mark in all this hurry?"

Mrs Paget and her daughters had settled about the fire for an hour's delicious discussion, but she interrupted it to say soothingly, "It was her cousin, Dad, who's going to be married, and she's been trying to get hold of just the right person—she says she's fearfully behindhand——"

"Well, you know best," said Mr Paget, departing a little discontentedly.

Left to the dying fire, the others talked, yawned, made a pretense of breaking up, talked and yawned again. The room grew chilly. Bruce—oldest of the children—dark, undemonstrative, weary—presently came in, and was given the news, and marveled in his turn. Bruce and Margaret had talked of their ambitions a hundred times: of the day when he might enter college and when she might find the leisure and beauty in life for which her soul hungered. Now, as he sat with his arm about her, and her head on his shoulder, he said with generous satisfaction over and over:

"It was *coming* to you, Mark; you've earned it!"

At midnight, loitering upstairs, cold and yawning, Margaret kissed

her mother and brother quietly, with whispered brief good nights. But Julie, lying warm and snug in bed half an hour later, had a last word:

"You know, Mark, I think I'm as happy as you are—no, I'm not generous at all! It's just that it makes me feel that things do come your way finally, if you wait long enough, and that we aren't the only family in town that never has anything decent happen to it! . . . I'll miss you awfully, Mark, darling! . . . Mark, do you suppose Mother'd let me take this bed out, and just have a big couch in here? It would make the room seem *so* much bigger. And then I could have the girls come up here, don't you know—when they come over. . . . Think of you—you—going abroad! I'd simply die! I can't wait to tell Betty! . . . I hope to goodness Mother won't put Beck in here! . . . We've had this room a long time together, haven't we? Ever since Grandma died. Do you remember her canary, that Teddy hit with a plate? . . . I'm going to miss you terribly, Mark. But we'll write. . . ."

CHAPTER III

In the days that followed, the miracle came to be accepted by all Weston, which was much excited for a day or two over this honor done a favorite daughter, and by all the Pagets—except Margaret. Margaret went through the hours in her old, quiet manner, a little more tender and gentle perhaps than she had been; but her heart never beat normally, and she lay awake late at night, and early in the morning, thinking, thinking, thinking. She tried to realize that it was in her honor that a farewell tea was planned at the club, it was for her that her fellow-teachers were planning a good-by luncheon; it was really she—Margaret Paget—whose voice said at the telephone a dozen times a day, "On the fourteenth—Oh, do I? I don't *feel* calm! Can't you try to come in—I do want to see you before I go!" She dutifully repeated Bruce's careful directions; she was to give her check to an expressman, and her suitcase to a red-cap; the expressman would probably charge fifty cents, the red-cap was to have no more than fifteen. And she was to tell the latter to put her into a taxicab.

"I'll remember," Margaret assured him gratefully, but with a sense of unreality pressing almost painfully upon her. One of a million ordinary school teachers, in a million little towns—and this marvel had befallen her!

The night of the Pagets' Christmas play came, a night full of laughter and triumph; and marked for Margaret by the little parting gifts that were slipped into her hands, and by the warm good wishes that were murmured, not always steadily, by this old friend and that. When the time came to distribute plates and paper napkins and great saucers of ice cream and sliced cake, Margaret was toasted in cold sweet lemonade; and drawing close together to "harmonize" more perfectly, the circle

about her touched their glasses while they sang, "For she's a jolly good fellow." Later, when the little supper was almost over, Ethel Elliot, leaning over to lay her hand on Margaret's, began in her rich contralto:

"When other lips and other hearts . . ."

and as they all went seriously through the two verses, they stood up, one by one, and linked arms; the little circle, affectionate and admiring, that had bounded Margaret's friendships until now.

Then Christmas came, with a dark, freezing walk to the pine-spiced and candle-lighted early service in the little church, and a quicker walk home, chilled and happy and hungry, to a riotous Christmas breakfast and a littered breakfast table. The new year came, with a dance and revel, and the Pagets took one of their long tramps through the snowy afternoon, and came back hungry for a big dinner. Then there was dressmaking—Mrs Schmidt in command, Mrs Paget tireless at the machine, Julie all eager interest. Margaret, patiently standing to be fitted, conscious of the icy, wet touch of Mrs Schmidt's red fingers on her bare arms, dreamily acquiescent as to buttons or hooks, was totally absent in spirit.

A trunk came, Mr Paget very anxious that the keys should not be "fooled with" by the children. Margaret's mother packed this trunk scientifically. "No, now the shoes, Mark—now that heavy skirt," she would say. "Run get mother some more tissue paper, Beck. You'll have to leave the big cape, dear, and you can send for it if you need it. Now the blue dress, Ju. I think that dyed so prettily, just the thing for mornings. And here's your prayer book in the tray, dear; if you go Saturday you'll want it the first thing in the morning. See, I'll put a fresh handkerchief in it——"

Margaret, relaxed and idle, in a rocker, with Duncan in her lap busily working at her locket, would say over and over:

"You're all such angels—I'll never forget it!" and wish that, knowing how sincerely she meant it, she could *feel* it a little more. Conversation languished in these days; mother and daughters feeling that time was too precious to waste speech of little things, and that their hearts were too full to touch upon the great change impending.

A night came when the Pagets went early upstairs, saying that, after all, it was not like people marrying and going to Russia; it was not like a real parting; it wasn't as if Mark couldn't come home again in four hours if anything went wrong at either end of the line. Margaret's heart was beating high and quick now; she tried to show some of the love and sorrow she knew she should have felt, she knew that she *did* feel under the hurry of her blood that made speech impossible. She went to her mother's door, slender and girlish in her white nightgown, to kiss her good-night again. Mrs Paget's big arms went about her daughter. Margaret laid her head childishly on her mother's shoulder. Nothing of sig-

nificance was said. Margaret whispered, "Mother, I love you!" Her mother said, "You were such a little thing, Mark, when I kissed you one day, without hugging you, and you said, 'Please don't love me just with your face, Mother, love me with your heart!'" Then she added, "Did you and Julie get that extra blanket down today, dear?—it's going to be very cold." Margaret nodded. "Good-night, little girl——" "Good-night, Mother——"

That was the real farewell, for the next morning was all confusion. They dressed hurriedly, by chilly gas-light; clocks were compared, Rebecca's back buttoned; Duncan's overcoat jerked on; coffee drunk scalding hot as they stood about the kitchen table; bread barely tasted. They walked to the railway station on wet sidewalks, under a broken sky, Bruce, with Margaret's suitcase, in the lead. Weston was asleep in the gray morning, after the storm. Far and near belated cocks were crowing.

A score of old friends met Margaret at the train; there were gifts, promises, good wishes. There came a moment when it was generally felt that the Pagets should be left alone, now—the far whistle of the train beyond the bridge—the beginning of good-bys—a sudden filling of the mother's eyes that was belied by her smile—"Good-by, sweetest—don't knock my hat off, baby dear! Beck, darling— Oh, Ju, *do!* don't just *say* it—start me a letter tonight! ALL write to me! Good-by, Dad, darling—all right, Bruce, I'll get right in!—good-by! Good-by!"

Then for the Pagets there was a walk back to the empty disorder of the house: Julie very talkative, at her father's side; Bruce walking far behind the others with his mother—and the day's familiar routine to be somehow gone through without Margaret.

But for Margaret, settling herself comfortably in the grateful warmth of the train, and watching the uncertain early sunshine brighten unfamiliar fields and farmhouses, every brilliant possibility in life seemed to be waiting. She tried to read, to think, to pray, to stare steadily out of the window; she could do nothing for more than a moment at a time. Her thoughts went backward and forward like a weaving shuttle: "How good they've all been to me! How grateful I am! Now if only, *only,* I can make good!"

"Look out for the servants!" Julie, from the depth of her sixteen-years-old wisdom had warned her sister. "The governess will hate you because she'll be afraid you'll cut her out, and Mrs Carr-Boldt's maid will be a cat! They always are, in books."

Margaret had laughed at this advice, but in her heart she rather believed it. Her new work seemed so enchanting to her that it was not easy to believe that she did not stand in somebody's light. She was glad that by a last-moment arrangement she was to arrive at the Grand Central Station at almost the same moment as Mrs Carr-Boldt herself, who was coming home from a three-weeks' visit in the Middle West. Margaret gave only half her attention to the flying country that was beginning to shape itself into streets and rows of houses; all the last

half-hour of the trip was clouded by the nervous fear that she would somehow fail to find Mrs Carr-Boldt in the confusion at the railroad terminal.

But happily enough the lady was found without trouble, or rather Margaret was found, felt an authoritative tap on her shoulder, caught a breath of fresh violets and a glimpse of her patron's clear-skinned, resolute face. They whirled through wet, deserted streets; Mrs Carr-Boldt gracious and talkative, Margaret nervously interested and amused.

Their wheels presently grated against a curb, a man in livery opened the limousine door. Margaret saw an immense stone mansion facing the park, climbed a dazzling flight of wide steps, and was in a great hall that faced an interior court, where there were Florentine marble benches, and the great lifted leaves of palms. She was a little dazed by crowded impressions: impressions of height and spaciousness and richness, and opening vistas; a great marble stairway, and a landing where there was an immense designed window in clear leaded glass; rugs, tapestries, mirrors, polished wood and great chairs with brocaded seats and carved dark backs. Two little girls, heavy, well-groomed little girls—one spectacled and good-natured looking, the other rather pretty, with a mass of fair hair—were coming down the stairs with an eager little German woman. They kissed their mother, much diverted by the mad rushes and leaps of the two white poodles who accompanied them.

"These are my babies, Miss Paget," said Mrs Carr-Boldt. "This is Victoria, who's eleven, and Harriet, who's six. And these are Monsieur——"

"Monsieur Patou and Monsieur Mouche," said Victoria, introducing the dogs with entire ease of manner. The German woman said something forcibly, and Margaret understood the child's reply in that tongue: "Mamma won't blame you, Fräulein; Harriet and I wished them to come down!"

Presently they all went up in a luxuriously fitted little lift, Margaret being carried to the fourth floor to her own rooms, to which a little maid escorted her.

When the maid had gone Margaret walked to the door and tried it, for no reason whatever; it was shut. Her heart was beating violently. She walked into the middle of the room and looked at herself in the mirror, and laughed a little breathless laugh. Then she took off her hat carefully and went into the bedroom that was beyond her sitting-room, and hung her hat in a fragrant white closet that was entirely and delightfully empty, and put her coat on a hanger, and her gloves and bag in the empty big top drawer of a great mahogany bureau. Then she went back to the mirror and looked hard at her own beauty reflected in it; and laughed her little laugh again.

"It's too good—it's too much!" she whispered.

She investigated her domain, after quelling a wild desire to sit down at the beautiful desk and try the new pens, the crystal ink-well, and the

heavy paper, with its severely engraved address, in a long letter to Mother.

There was a tiny upright piano in the sitting-room, and at the fireplace a deep thick rug, and an immense leather armchair. A clock in crystal and gold flanked by two crystal candlesticks had the center of the mantelpiece. On the little round mahogany center table was a lamp with a wonderful mosaic shade; a little bookcase was filled with books and magazines. Margaret went to one of the three windows, and looked down upon the bare trees and the snow in the park, and upon the rumbling green omnibuses, all bathed in bright chilly sunlight.

A mahogany door with a crystal knob opened into the bedroom, where there was a polished floor, and more rugs, and a gay rosy wall paper, and a great bed with a lace cover. Beyond was a bathroom, all enamel, marble, glass, and nickel-plate, with heavy monogrammed towels on the rack, three new little wash-cloths sealed in glazed paper, three new toothbrushes in paper cases, and a cake of famous English soap just out of its wrapper.

Over the whole little suite there brooded an exquisite order. Not a particle of dust broke the shining surfaces of the mahogany, not a fallen leaf lay under the great bowl of roses on the desk. Now and then the radiator clanked in the stillness; it was hard to believe in that warmth and silence that a cold winter wind was blowing outside, and that snow still lay on the ground.

Margaret, resting luxuriously in the big chair, became thoughtful; presently she went into the bedroom, and knelt down beside the bed.

"O Lord, let me stay here," she prayed, her face in her hands. "I want so to stay—make me a success!"

Never was a prayer more generously answered. Miss Paget was an instant success. In something less than two months she became indispensable to Mrs Carr-Boldt, and was a favorite with every one, from the rather stolid, silent head of the house down to the least of the maids. She was so busy, so unaffected, so sympathetic, that her sudden rise in favor was resented by no one. The butler told her his troubles, the French maid darkly declared that but for Miss Paget she would not for one second r-r-remain! The children went cheerfully even to the dentist with their adored Miss Peggy; they soon preferred her escort to matinee or zoo to that of any other person. Margaret also escorted Mrs Carr-Boldt's mother, a magnificent old lady, on shopping expeditions, and attended the meetings of charity boards for Mrs Carr-Boldt. With notes and invitations, account books and check books, dinner lists, and interviews with caterers, decorators, and florists, Margaret's time was full, but she loved every moment of her work, and gloried in her increasing usefulness.

At first there were some dark days; notably the dreadful one upon which Margaret somehow—somewhere—dropped the box containing the

new hat she was bringing home for Harriet, and kept the little girl out in the cold afternoon air while the motor made a fruitless trip back to the milliner's. Harriet contracted a cold, and Harriet's mother for the first time spoke severely to Margaret. There was another bad day when Margaret artlessly admitted to Mrs Pierre Polk at that telephone that Mrs Carr-Boldt was not engaged for dinner that evening, thus obliging her employer to snub the lady, or accept a distasteful invitation to dine. And there was a most uncomfortable occasion when Mr Carr-Boldt, not at all at his best, stumbled in upon his wife with some angry observations meant for her ear alone; and Margaret, busy with accounts in a window recess, was, unknown to them both, a distressed witness.

"Another time, Miss Paget," said Mrs Carr-Boldt, coldly, upon Margaret's appearing scarlet-cheeked between the curtains, "don't oblige me to ascertain that you are not within hearing before feeling sure of privacy. Will you finish those bills upstairs, if you please?"

Margaret went upstairs with a burning heart, cast her bills haphazard on her own desk, and flung herself, dry-eyed and furious, on the bed. She was far too angry to think, but lay there for perhaps twenty minutes with her brain whirling. Finally rising, she brushed up her hair, straightened her collar, and, full of tremendous resolves, stepped into her little sitting-room, to find Mrs Carr-Boldt in the big chair, serenely eying her.

"I'm so sorry I spoke so, Peggy," said her employer, generously. "But the truth is, I am not myself when—when Mr Carr-Boldt——" The little hesitating appeal in her voice completely disarmed Margaret. In the end the little episode cemented the rapidly growing friendship between the two women, Mrs Carr-Boldt seeming to enjoy the relief of speaking rather freely of what was the one real trial of her life.

"My husband has always had too much money," she said, in her positive way. "At one time we were afraid that he would absolutely ruin his health by this—habit of his. His physician and I took him around the world—I left Victoria, just a baby, with mother—and for two years he was never out of my sight. It has never been so bad since. You know yourself how reliable he usually is," she finished cheerfully, "unless some of the other men get hold of him!"

As the months went on Margaret came to admire her employer more and more. There was not an indolent impulse in Mrs Carr-Boldt's entire composition. Smooth-haired, fresh-skinned, in spotless linen, she began the day at eight o'clock, full of energy and interest. She had daily sessions with butler and housekeeper, shopped with Margaret and the children, walked about her greenhouse or her country garden with her skirts pinned up, and had tulips potted and stone work continued. She was prominent in several clubs, a famous dinner-giver, she took a personal interest in all her servants, loved to settle their quarrels and have three or four of them up on the carpet at once, tearful and explanatory. Margaret kept for her a list of some two hundred friends, whose birthdays were to be marked with carefully selected gifts. She pleased Mrs Carr-

Boldt by her open amazement at the latter's vitality. The girl observed that her employer could not visit any institution without making a few vigorous suggestions as she went about; she accompanied her checks to the organized charities—and her charity flowed only through absolutely reliable channels—with little friendly, advisory letters. She liked the democratic attitude for herself—even while promptly snubbing any such tendency in children or friends—and told Margaret that she only used her coat of arms on house linen, stationery, and livery because her husband and mother liked it. "It's of course rather nice to realize that one comes from one of the oldest of the Colonial families," she would say, "The Carterets of Maryland, you know.—But it's all such bosh!"

And she urged Margaret to claim her own right to family honors: "You're a Quincy, my dear! Don't let that woman intimidate you—she didn't remember that her grandfather was a captain until her husband made his money. And where the family portraits came from I don't know, but I think there's a man on Fourth Avenue who does 'em!" she would say, or, "I know all about Lilly Reynolds, Peggy. Her father was as rich as she says, and I daresay the crest is theirs. But ask her what her maternal grandmother did for a living, if you want to shut her up!" Other people she would condemn with a mere whispered "Coal!" or "Patent bathtubs!" behind her fan, and it pleased her to tell people that her treasure of a secretary had the finest blood in the world in her veins. Margaret was much admired, and Margaret was her discovery, and she liked to emphasize her find.

Mrs Carr-Boldt's mother, a tremulous, pompous old lady, unwittingly aided the impression by taking an immense fancy to Margaret, and by telling her few intimates and the older women among her daughter's friends that the girl was a perfect little thoroughbred. When the Carr-Boldts filled their house with the reckless and noisy company they occasionally affected, Mrs Carteret would say majestically to Margaret:

"You and I have nothing in common with this riff-raff, my dear!"

Summer came, and Margaret headed a happy letter "Bar Harbor." Two months later all Weston knew that Margaret Paget was going abroad for a year with those rich people, and had written her mother from the *Lusitania*. Letters from London, from Germany, from Holland, from Russia, followed. "We are going to put the girls at school in Switzerland, and (ahem!) winter on the Riviera, and then Rome for Holy Week!" she wrote.

She was presently home again, chattering French and German to amuse her father, teaching Becky a little Italian song to match her little Italian costume.

"It's wonderful to me how you get along with all these rich people, Mark," said her mother, admiringly, during Margaret's home visit. Mrs Paget was watering the dejected-looking side garden with a straggling

length of hose; Margaret and Julie shelling peas on the side steps. Margaret laughed, coloring a little.

"Why, we're *just* as good as they are, Mother!"

Mrs Paget drenched a dried little clump of carnations.

"We're as *good,*" she admitted; "but we're not as rich or as traveled—we haven't the same ideas; we belong to a different class."

"Oh, no, we don't, Mother," Margaret said quickly. "Who are the Carr-Boldts, except for their money? Why, Mrs Carteret—for all her family!—isn't *half* the aristocrat Grandma was! And you—you could be a Daughter of The Officers of the Revolution, Mother!"

"Why, Mark, I never heard that!" her mother protested, cleaning the sprinkler with a hairpin.

"Mother!" Julie said eagerly, "Great-grandfather Quincy!"

"Oh, Grandpa," said Mrs Paget. "Yes, Grandpa was a paymaster. He was on Governor Hancock's staff. They used to call him 'Major.' But Mark——" She turned off the water, holding her skirts away from the combination of mud and dust underfoot, "that's a very silly way to talk, dear! Money does make a difference; it does no good to go back into the past and say that this one was a judge and that one a major; we must live our lives where we *are!*"

Margaret had not lost a wholesome respect for her mother's opinion in the two years she had been away, but she had lived in a very different world, and was full of new ideas.

"Mother, do you mean to tell me that if you and Dad hadn't had a perfect pack of children, and moved so much, and if Dad—say—had been in that oil deal that he said he wished he had the money for, and we still lived in the brick house, that you wouldn't be in every way the equal of Mrs Carr-Boldt?"

"If you mean as far as *money* goes, Mark—no. We might have been well-to-do as country people go, I suppose——"

"Exactly!" said Margaret; "and you would have been as well off as dozens of the people who are going about in society this minute! It's the merest chance that we aren't rich. Just for instance: Father's father had twelve children, didn't he?—and left them—how much was it?—about three thousand dollars apiece——"

"And a Godsend it was, too," said her mother, reflectively.

"But suppose Dad had been the only child, Mother," Margaret persisted, "he would have had——"

"He would have had the whole thirty-six thousand dollars, I suppose, Mark."

"Or more," said Margaret, "for Grandfather Paget was presumably spending money on them all the time."

"Well, but Mark," said Mrs Paget, laughing as at the vagaries of a small child, "Father Paget *did* have twelve children—and Daddy and I eight—" she sighed, as always, at the thought of the little son who was gone—"and there you are! You can't get away from that, dear."

Margaret did not answer. But she thought to herself that very few people held Mother's views of this subject.

Mrs Carr-Boldt's friends, for example, did not accept increasing cares in this resigned fashion; their lives were ideally pleasant and harmonious without the complicated responsibilities of large families. They drifted from season to season without care, always free, always gay, always irreproachably gowned. In winter there were daily meetings, for shopping, for luncheon, bridge, or tea; summer was filled with a score of country visits. There were motor-trips for week-ends, dinners, theater, and the opera to fill the evenings, German or singing lessons, manicure, masseuse, and dressmaker to crowd the morning hours all the year round. Margaret learned from these exquisite, fragrant creatures the art of being perpetually fresh and charming, learned their methods of caring for their own beauty, learned to love rare toilet waters and powders, fine embroidered linen and silk stockings. There was no particular strain upon her wardrobe now, nor upon her purse; she could be as dainty as she liked. She listened to the conversations that went on about her—sometimes critical or unconvinced; more often admiring; and as she listened she found slowly but certainly her own viewpoint. She was not mercenary. She would not marry a man *just* for his money, she decided, but just as certainly she would not marry a man who could not give her a comfortable establishment, a position in society.

The man seemed in no hurry to appear; as a matter of fact, the men whom Margaret met were openly anxious to evade marriage, even with the wealthy girls of their own set. Margaret was not concerned; she was too happy to miss the love-making element; the men she saw were not of a type to inspire a sensible, busy, happy girl with any very deep feeling. And it was with generous and perfect satisfaction that she presently had news of Julie's happy engagement. Julie was to marry a young and popular doctor, the only child of one of Weston's most prominent families. The little sister's letter bubbled joyously with news.

"Harry's father is going to build us a little house on the big place, the darling," wrote Julie; "and we will stay with them until it is done. But in five years Harry says we will have a real honeymoon, *in Europe!* Think of going to Europe *as a married woman.* Mark, I wish you could see my ring; it is a *beauty,* but don't tell Mother I was silly enough to write about it!"

Margaret delightedly selected a little collection of things for Julie's trousseau. A pair of silk stockings, a scarf she never had worn, a lace petticoat, pink silk for a waist. Mrs Carr-Boldt, coming in in the midst of these preparations, insisted upon adding so many other things from trunks and closets, that Margaret was speechless with delight. Scarves, cobwebby silks in uncut lengths, embroidered lingerie still in the tissue paper of Paris shops, parasols, gloves, and lengths of lace—she piled all of them into Margaret's arms. Julie's trousseau was consequently quite the most beautiful Weston had ever seen; and the little sister's

cloudless joy made the fortnight Margaret spent at home at the time of the wedding a very happy one. It was a time of rush and flurry, laughter and tears, of roses, and girls in white gowns. But some ten days before the wedding Julie and Margaret happened to be alone for a peaceful hour over their sewing, and fell to talking seriously.

"You see, our house will be small," said Julie; "but I don't care—we don't intend to stay in Weston all our lives. Don't breathe this to any one, Mark, but if Harry does as well as he's doing now for two years, we'll rent the little house, and we're going to Baltimore for a year for a special course. Then—you know he's devoted to Doctor McKim, he always calls him 'the chief'—then he thinks *maybe* McKim will work him into his practice—he's getting old, you know, and that means New York!"

"Oh, Ju—*really!*"

"I don't see why not," Julie said, dimpling. "Harry's crazy to do it. He says he doesn't propose to live and die in Weston. McKim could throw any amount of hospital practice his way, to begin with. And you know Harry'll have something—and the house will rent. I'm crazy," said Julie, enthusiastically, "to take one of those lovely old apartments on Washington Square, and meet a few nice people, you know, and really *make* something of my life!"

"Mrs Carr-Boldt and I will spin down for you every few days," Margaret said, falling readily in with the plan. "I'm glad you're not going to simply get into a rut the way some of the other girls have, cooking and babies and nothing else!" she said.

"I think that's an awful mistake," Julie said placidly. "Starting in right is so important. I don't want to be a mere drudge like Ethel or Louise—they may like it. I don't! Of course, this isn't a matter to talk of," she went on, coloring a little. "I'd never breathe this to Mother! But it's perfectly absurd to pretend that girls don't discuss these things. I've talked to Betty and Louise—we all talk about it, you know. And Louise says they haven't had *one* free second since Buddy came. She can't keep one maid, and she says the idea of *two* maids eating their three meals a day, whether she's home or not, makes her perfectly sick! Some one's got to be with him every single second, even now, when he's four—to see that he doesn't fall off something or put things in his mouth. And as Louise says—it means no more week-end trips; you can't go visiting overnight, you can't even go for a day's drive or a day on the beach, without extra clothes for the baby, a mosquito-net and an umbrella for the baby—milk packed in ice for the baby—somebody trying to get the baby to take his nap—it's awful! It would *end* our Baltimore plan, and that means New York, and New York means everything to Harry and me!" finished Julie, contentedly, flattening a finished bit of embroidery on her knee, and regarding it complacently.

"Well, I think you're right," Margaret approved. "Things are different now from what they were in Mother's day."

"And look at Mother," Julie said. "One long slavery! Life's too short to wear yourself out that way!"

Mrs Paget's sunny cheerfulness was sadly shaken when the actual moment of parting with the exquisite, rose-hatted, gray-frocked Julie came; her face worked pitifully in its effort to smile; her tall figure, awkward in an ill-made, unbecoming new silk, seemed to droop tenderly over the little clinging wife. Margaret, stirred by the sight of tears on her mother's face, stood with an arm about her, when the bride and groom drove away in the afternoon sunshine.

"I'm going to stay with you until she gets back!" she reminded her mother.

"And you know you've always said you wanted the girls to marry, Mother," urged Mr Paget. Rebecca felt this a felicitous moment to ask if she and the boys could have the rest of the ice cream.

"Divide it evenly," said Mrs Paget, wiping her eyes and smiling. "Yes, I know, Daddy dear, I'm an ungrateful woman! I suppose your turn will come next, Mark, and then I don't know what I *will* do!"

CHAPTER IV

BUT MARGARET'S TURN did not come for nearly a year. Then—in Germany again, and lingering at a great Berlin hotel because the spring was so beautiful, and the city so sweet with linden bloom, and especially because there were two Americans at the hotel whose game of bridge it pleased Mr and Mrs Carr-Boldt daily to hope they could match—then Margaret transformed within a few hours from a merely pretty, very dignified, perfectly contented secretary, entirely satisfied with what she wore as long as it was suitable and fresh, into a living woman whose cheeks paled and flushed at nothing but her thoughts, who laughed at herself in her mirror, loitered over her toilet trying one gown after another, and walked half-smiling through a succession of rosy dreams.

It all came about very simply. One of the aforementioned bridge players wondered if Mrs Carr-Boldt and her niece—oh, wasn't it?—her secretary then—would like to hear a very interesting young American professor lecture this morning?—wondered, when they were fanning themselves in the airy lecture-room, if they would care to meet Professor Tenison?

Margaret looked into a pair of keen, humorous eyes, answered with her own smile Professor Tenison's sudden charming one, lost her small hand in his big firm one. Then she listened to him talk, as he strode about the platform, boyishly shaking back the hair that fell across his forehead. After that he walked to the hotel with them, through dazzling seas of perfume, and of flowers, under the enchanted shifting green of great trees—or so Margaret thought. There was a plunge from the hot street

into the awninged cool gloom of the hotel, and then a luncheon, when the happy steady murmur from their own table seemed echoed by the murmurous clink and stir and laughter all about them, and accented by the not-too-close music from the band.

Doctor Tenison was everything charming, Margaret thought, instantly drawn by the unaffected, friendly manner, and watching the interested gleam of his blue eyes and the white flash of his teeth. He was a gentleman, to begin with; distinguished at thirty-two in his chosen work; big and well-built, without suggesting the athlete, of an old and honored American family, and the only son of a rich—and eccentric—old doctor whom Mrs Carr-Boldt chanced to know.

He was frankly delighted at the chance that had brought him in contact with these charming people; and as Mrs Carr-Boldt took an instant fancy to him, and as he was staying at their own hotel, they saw him after that every day, and several times a day. Margaret would come down the great sun-bathed stairway in the morning to find him patiently waiting in a porch chair. Her heart would give a great leap—half joy, half new strange pain, as she recognized him. There would be time for a chat over their fruit and eggs before Mr Carr-Boldt came down, all ready for a motor-trip, or Mrs Carr-Boldt, swathed in cream-colored coat and flying veils, joined them with an approving "Good-morning."

Margaret would remember these breakfasts all her life: the sun-splashed little table in a corner of the great dining-room, the rosy fatherly waiter who was so much delighted with her German, the busy picturesque traffic in the street just below the wide-open window. She would always remember a certain filmy silk striped gown, a wide hat loaded with daisies; always love the odor of linden trees in the spring.

Sometimes the professor went with them on their morning drive, to be dropped at the lecture-hall with Margaret and Mrs Carr-Boldt. The latter was pleased to take the course of lectures very seriously, and carried a handsome Russian leather note-book, and a gold pencil. Sometimes after luncheon they all went on an expedition together, and now and then Margaret and Doctor Tenison went off alone on foot, to explore the city. They would end the afternoon with coffee and little cakes in some tea-room, and come home tired and merry in the long shadows of the spring sunset, with wilted flowers from the street markets in their hands.

There was one glorious tramp in the rain, when the professor's great laugh rang out like a boy's for sheer high spirits, and when Margaret was an enchanting vision in her long coat, with her cheeks glowing through blown wet tendrils of her hair. That day they had tea in the deserted charming little parlor of a tiny inn, and drank it toasting their feet over a glowing fire.

"Is Mrs Carr-Boldt your mother's or your father's sister?" John Tenison asked, watching his companion with approval.

"Oh, good gracious!" said Margaret, laughing over her teacup.

"Haven't I told you yet that I'm only her secretary? I never saw Mrs Carr-Boldt until five years ago."

"Perhaps you did tell me. But I got it into my head, that first day, that you were aunt and niece——"

"People do, I think," Margaret said thoughtfully, "because we're both fair." She did not say that but for Mrs Carr-Boldt's invaluable maid the likeness would have been less marked, on this score at least. "I taught school," she went on simply, "and Mrs Carr-Boldt happened to come to my school, and she asked me to come to her."

"You're all alone in the world, Miss Paget?" He was eyeing her musingly; the direct question came quite naturally.

"Oh, dear me, no! My father and mother are living"; and feeling, as she always did, a little claim on her loyalty, she added: "We are, or were, rather, Southern people—but my father settled in a very small New York town——"

"Mrs Carr-Boldt told me that—I'd forgotten——" said Professor Tenison, and he carried the matter entirely out of Margaret's hands—much, much further indeed than she would have carried it, by continuing, "She tells me that Quincyport was named for your mother's grandfather, and that Judge Paget was your father's father."

"Father's uncle," Margaret corrected, although as a matter of fact Judge Paget had been no nearer than her father's second cousin. "But father always called him uncle," Margaret assured herself inwardly. To the Quincyport claim she said nothing. Quincyport was in the county that Mother's people had come from; Quincy was a very unusual name, and the original Quincy had been a Charles, which certainly was one of Mother's family names. Margaret and Julie, browsing about among the colonial histories and genealogies of the Weston Public Library years before, had come to a jubilant certainty that Mother's grandfather *must* have been the same man. But she did not feel quite so positive now.

"Your people aren't still in the South, you said?"

"Oh, no!" Margaret cleared her throat. "They're in Weston—Weston, New York."

"*Weston!* Not near Dayton?"

"Why, yes! Do you know Dayton?"

"Do I know Dayton?" He was like an eager child. "Why, my Aunt Pamela lives there; the only mother I ever knew! I knew Weston, too, a little. Lovely homes there, some of them—old colonial houses. And your mother lives there? Is she fond of flowers?"

"She loves them," Margaret said, vaguely uncomfortable.

"Well, she must know Aunt Pamela," said John Tenison, enthusiastically. "I expect they'd be great friends. And *you* must know Aunt Pam. She's like a dainty old piece of china, or a—I don't know, a tea rose! She's never married, and she lives in the most charming brick house, with brick walls and hollyhocks all about it, and such an atmosphere inside! She has an old maid and an old gardener, and—don't you know—

she's the sort of woman who likes to sit down under a portrait of your great-grandfather, in a dim parlor full of mahogany and rose jars, with her black silk skirts spreading about her, and an Old Blue cup in her hand, and talk family—how cousin this married a man whose people aren't anybody, and cousin that is outraging precedent by naming her child for her husband's side of the house. She's a funny, dear old lady! You know, Miss Paget," the professor went on, with his eager, impersonal air, "when I met you, I *thought* you didn't quite seem like a New Yorker and a Bar Harborer—if that's the word! Aunt Pam—you know she's my only mother, I got all my early knowledge from her!—Aunt Pam detests the usual New York girl, and the minute I met you I knew she'd like you. You'd sort of fit into the Dayton picture, with your braids, and those ruffly things you wear!"

Margaret said simply, "I would love to meet her," and began slowly to draw on her gloves. It surely was not requisite that she should add, "But you must not confuse my home with any such exquisitely ordered existence as that. We are poor people, our house is crowded, our days a severe and endless struggle with the ugly things of life. We have good blood in our veins, but not more than hundreds of thousands of other American families. My mother would not understand one tenth of your aunt's conversation; your aunt would find very uninteresting the things that are vital to my mother."

No, she couldn't say that. She picked up her dashing little hat, and pinned it over her loosened soft mass of yellow hair, and buttoned up her storm coat, and plunged her hands deep in her pockets. No, the professor would call on her at Bar Harbor, take a yachting trip with the Carr-Boldts perhaps, and then—and then, when they were really good friends, some day she would ask Mother to have a simple little luncheon, and Mrs Carr-Boldt would let her bring Doctor Tenison down in the motor from New York. And meantime—no need to be too explicit.

For just two happy weeks Margaret lived in Wonderland. The fourteen days were a revelation to her. Life seemed to grow warmer, more rosy-colored. Little things became significant; every moment carried its freight of joy. Her beauty, always notable, became almost startling: there was a new glow in her cheeks and lips, new fire in the dark-lashed eyes that were so charming a contrast to her bright hair. Like a pair of joyous and irresponsible children she and John Tenison walked through the days, too happy ever to pause and ask themselves whither they were going.

Then abruptly it ended. Victoria, brought down from school in Switzerland with various indications of something wrong, was in a flash a sick child; a child who must be hurried home to the only surgeon in whom Mrs Carr-Boldt placed the least trust. There was hurried packing, telephoning, wiring; it was only a few hours after the great German physician's diagnosis that they were all at the railway station, breathless, nervous, eager to get started.

Doctor Tenison accompanied them to the station, and in the five minutes' wait before their train left, a little incident occurred, the memory of which clouded Margaret's dreams for many a day to come. Arriving, as they were departing, were the St George Allens, noisy, rich, arrogant New Yorkers, for whom Margaret had a special dislike. The Allens fell joyously upon the Carr-Boldt party, with a confusion of greetings. "And Jack Tenison!" shouted Lily Allen, delightedly. "Well, what *fun!* What are you doing here?"

"I'm feeling a little lonely," said the professor, smiling at Mrs Carr-Boldt.

"Nothing like that; unsay them woyds," said Maude Allen, cheerfully. "Mamma, make him dine with us! Say you will."

"I assure you I was dreading the lonely evening," John Tenison said gratefully. Margaret's last glimpse of his face was between Lily's pink and cherry hat and Maude's astonishing headgear of yellow straw, gold braid, spangled quills, and calla lilies. She carried a secret heartache through the worried fortnight of Victoria's illness and the busy days that followed; for Mrs Carr-Boldt had one of many nervous breakdowns, and took her turn at the hospital when Victoria came home. For the first time in five happy years Margaret drooped, and for the first time a longing for money and power of her own gnawed at the girl's heart. If she had but her share of these things, she could hold her own against a hundred Maude and Lily Allens.

As it was, she told herself a little bitterly, she was only a secretary, one of the hundred paid dependents of a rich woman. She was only, after all, a little middle-class country school teacher.

CHAPTER V

"So you're going home to your own people for the week-end, Peggy? And how many of you are there, I always forget?" said young Mrs George Crawford, negligently. She tipped back in her chair, half shut her novel, half shut her eyes, and looked critically at her finger nails.

Outside the big country house summer sunshine flooded the smooth lawns, sparkled on the falling diamonds and still pool of the fountain, glowed over acres of matchless wood and garden. But deep awnings made a clear cool shade indoors, and the wide rooms were delightfully breezy.

Margaret, busy with a ledger and check book, smiled absently, finished a long column, made an orderly entry, and wiped her pen.

"Seven," said she, smiling.

"Seven!" echoed Mrs Potter, lazily. "My heaven—seven children! How early Victorian!"

"Isn't it?" said a third woman, a very beautiful woman, Mrs Watts Watson, who was also idling and reading in the white-and-gray morning-

room. "Well," she added, dropping her magazine, and locking her hands about her head, "my grandmother had ten. Fancy trying to raise ten children!"

"Oh, everything's different now," the first speaker said indifferently. "Everything's more expensive, life is more complicated. People used to have roomier houses, aunts and cousins and grandmothers living with them; there was always some one at home with the children. Nowadays we don't do that."

"And thank the saints we don't!" said Mrs. Watson, piously. "If there's one thing I *can't* stand, it's a houseful of things-in-law!"

"Of course; but I mean it made the family problem simpler," Mrs Crawford pursued. "Oh—and I don't know! Everything was so simple. All this business of sterilizing, and fumigating, and pasteurizing, and vaccinating, and boiling in boracic acid wasn't done in those days," she finished vaguely.

"Now there you are—now *there you are!*" said Mrs Carr-Boldt, entering into the conversation with sudden force. Entirely recovered after her nervous collapse, as brisk as ever in her crisp linen gown, she was signing the checks that Margaret handed her, frowningly busy and absorbed with her accounts. Now she leaned back in her chair, glanced at the watch at her wrist, and relaxed the cramped muscles of her body. "That's exactly it, Rose," said she to Mrs Crawford. "Life *is* more complicated. People—the very people who ought to have children—simply cannot afford it! And who's to blame? Can you blame a woman whose life is packed full of other things she simply cannot avoid, if she declines to complicate things any further? Our grandmothers didn't have telephones, or motor-cars, or week-end affairs, or even—for that matter—manicures and hair-dressers! A good heavy silk was full dress all the year 'round. They washed their own hair. The 'upstairs girl' answered the door-bell—why, they didn't even have talcum powder and nursery refrigerators, and sanitary rugs that have to be washed every day! Do you suppose my grandmother ever took a baby's temperature, or had its eyes and nose examined, or its adenoids cut? They had more children, and they lost more children—without any reason or logic whatever. Poor things, they never thought of doing anything else, I suppose! A fat old darky nurse brought up the whole crowd—it makes one shudder to think of it! Why, I had *always* a trained nurse, and the regular nurse used to take two baths a day. I insisted on *that,* and both nurseries were washed out every day with chloride of potash solution, and the iron beds washed every week! And even then Vic had this mastoid trouble, and Harriet got everything, almost."

"Exactly," said Mrs Watson. "That's you, Hattie, with all the money in the world. Now do you wonder that some of the rest of us, who have to think of money—in short," she finished decidedly, "do you wonder that people are *not* having children? At first, naturally, one doesn't want them—for three or four years, I'm sure, the thought doesn't come into

one's head. But then, afterward—you see, I've been married fifteen years now!—afterward, I think it would be awfully nice to have one or two little kiddies, if it was a possible thing. But it isn't."

"No, it isn't," Mrs Crawford agreed. "You don't want to have them unless you're able to do everything in the world for them. If I were Hat here, I'd have a dozen."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't," Mrs Carr-Boldt assured her promptly. "No, you wouldn't! You can't leave everything to servants—there are clothes to think of, and dentists, and special teachers, and it's frightfully hard to get a nursery governess. And then you've got to see that they know the right people—don't you know?—and give them parties—I tell you it's a *strain*."

"Well, I don't believe my mother with her seven ever worked any harder than you do!" said Margaret, with the admiration in her eyes that was so sweet to the older woman. "Look at this morning—did you sit down before you came in here twenty minutes ago?"

"I? Indeed I didn't!" Mrs Carr-Boldt said. "I had my breakfast and letters at seven, bath at eight, straightened out that squabble between Swann and the cook—I think Paul is still simmering, but that's neither here nor there!—then I went down with the vet to see the mare. Joe'll never forgive me if I've really broken the creature's knees!—then I telephoned mother, and saw Harriet's violin man, and talked to that Italian Joe sent up to clean the oils—he's in the gallery now, and—let's see——"

"Italian lesson," Margaret prompted.

"Italian lesson," the other echoed, "and then came in here to sign my checks."

"You're so executive, Harriet!" said Mrs Crawford, languidly.

"Apropos of Swann," Margaret said, "he confided to me that *he* has seven children—on a little farm down on Long Island."

"The butler—oh, I dare say!" Mrs Watson agreed. "They can, because they've no standard to maintain—seven, or seventeen—the only difference in expense is the actual amount of bread and butter consumed."

"It's too bad," said Mrs Crawford. "But you've got to handle the question sanely and reasonably, like any other. Now, I love children," she went on. "I'm perfectly crazy about my sister's little girl. She's eleven now, and the cutest thing alive. But when I think of all Mabel's been through, since she was born—I realize that it's a little *too* much to expect of any woman. Now, look at us—there are thousands of people fixed as we are. We're in an apartment hotel, with one maid. There's no room for a second maid, no porch and no backyard. Well, the baby comes—one loses, before and after the event, just about six months of *everything*, and of course the expense is frightful, but no matter!—the baby comes. We take a house. That means three indoor maids, George's chauffeur, a man for lawn and furnace—that's five——"

"Doubling expenses," said Mrs Carr-Boldt, thoughtfully.

"Doubling——! *Trebling,* or more. But that's not all. Baby must be out from eleven to three every day. So you've got to go sit by the carriage in the park while nurse goes home for her lunch. Or, if you're out for luncheon, or giving a luncheon, she brings baby home, bumps the carriage into the basement, carries the baby upstairs, eats her lunch in snatches—the maids don't like it, and I don't blame them! I know how it was with Mabel; she had to give up that wonderful old apartment of theirs on Gramercy Park. Sid had his studio on the top floor, and she had such a lovely flat on the next floor, but there was no lift, and no laundry, and the kitchen was small—a baby takes so much fussing! And then she lost that splendid cook of hers, Germaine. *She* wouldn't stand it. Up to that time she'd been cooking and waiting, too, but the baby ended that. Mabel took a house, and Sid paid studio rent besides, and they had two maids, and then three maids—and what with their fighting, and their days off, and eternally changing, Mabel was a *wreck.* I've seen her trying to play a bridge hand with Dorothy bobbing about on her arm—poor girl! Finally they went to a hotel, and of course the child got older, and was less trouble. But to this day Mabel doesn't dare leave her alone for one second. And when they go out to dinner, and leave her alone in the hotel, of course the child cries——!"

"That's the worst of a kiddie," Mrs Watson said. "You can't ever turn 'em off, as it were, or make it spades! They're always right on the job. I'll never forget Elsie Clay. She was the best friend I had—my bridesmaid, too. She married, and after a while they took a house in Jersey because of the baby. I went out there to lunch one day. There she was in a house perfectly buried in trees, with the rain sopping down outside, and smoke blowing out of the fireplace, and the drawing-room as dark as pitch at two o'clock. Elsie said she used to nearly die of loneliness, sitting there all afternoon long listening to the trains whistling, and the maid thumping irons in the kitchen, and picking up the baby's blocks. And they quarreled, you know, she and her husband—that was the beginning of the trouble. Finally the boy went to his grandmother, and now I believe Elsie's married again, and living in California somewhere."

Margaret, hanging over the back of her chair, was an attentive listener.

"But people—people in town have children!" she said. "The Blankenships have one, and haven't the de Normandy's?"

"The Blankenship boy is in college," said Mrs Carr-Boldt; "and the little de Normandys lived with their grandmother until they were old enough for boarding-school."

"Well, the Deanes have three!" Margaret said triumphantly.

"Ah, well, my dear! Harry Deane's a rich man, and she was a Pell of Philadelphia," Mrs Crawford supplied promptly. "Now the Eastmans have three, too, with a trained nurse apiece."

"I see," Margaret admitted slowly.

"Far wiser to have none at all," said Mrs Carr-Boldt, in her decisive

way, "than to handicap them from the start by letting them see other children enjoying pleasures and advantages they can't afford. And now, girls, let's stop wasting time. It's half-past eleven. Why can't we have a game of auction right here and now?"

Margaret returned to her check book with speed. The other two, glad to be aroused, heartily approved the idea.

"Well, what does this very businesslike aspect imply?" Mrs Carr-Boldt asked her secretary.

"It means that I can't play cards, and you oughtn't," Margaret said, laughing.

"Oh? Why not?"

"Because you've *lots* of things to do, and I've got to finish these notes, and I have to sit with Harriet while she does her German——"

"Where's Fräulein?"

"Fräulein's going to drive Vic over to the Partridges' for luncheon, and I promised Swann I'd talk to him about favors and things for to-morrow night."

"Well—busy Lizzie! And what have I to do?"

Margaret reached for a well-filled date-book.

"You were to decide about those alterations, the porch and dining-room, you know," said she. "There are some architect's sketches around here; the man's going to be here early in the morning. You said you'd drive to the yacht club, to see about the stage for the children's play; you were to stop on the way back and see old Mrs McNab a moment. You wanted to write Mrs Polk a note to catch the *Kaiserin Augusta*, and luncheon's early because of the Kellogg bridge." She shut the book. "And call Mr Carr-Boldt at the club at one," she added.

"All that, now fancy!" said her employer, admiringly.

She had swept some scattered magazines from a small table, and was now seated there, negligently shuffling a pack of cards in her fine white hands.

"Ring, will you, Peggy?" said she.

"And the boat races are today, and you dine at Oaks-in-the-Field," Margaret supplemented inflexibly.

"Yes? Well, come and beat the seven of clubs," said Mrs Carr-Boldt, spreading the deck for the draw.

"Fräulein," she said sweetly, a moment later, when a maid had summoned that worthy and earnest governess, "tell Miss Harriet that Mother doesn't want her to do her German today, it's too warm. Tell her that she's to go with you and Miss Victoria for a drive. Thank you. And, Fräulein, will you telephone old Mrs McNab, and say that Mrs Carr-Boldt is lying down with a severe headache, and she won't be able to come in this morning? Thank you. And Fräulein, telephone the yacht club, will you? And tell Mr Matthews that Mrs Carr-Boldt is indisposed and he'll have to come back this afternoon. I'll talk to him before the children's races. And—one thing more! Will you tell Swann Miss Paget

will see him about tomorrow's dinner when she comes back from the yacht club today? And tell him to send us something cool to drink now. Thank you so much. No, shut it. Thank you. Have a nice drive!"

They all drew up their chairs to the table.

"You and I, Rose," said Mrs Watson. "I'm so glad you suggested this, Hattie. I am dying to play."

"It really rests me more than anything else," said Mrs Carr-Boldt. "Two spades."

CHAPTER VI

Archerton, a blur of flying trees and houses, bright in the late sunlight, Pottsville, with children wading and shouting, under the bridge, Hunt's Crossing, then the next would be Weston and home.

Margaret, beginning to gather wraps and small possessions together, sighed. She sighed partly because her head ached, partly because the hot trip had mussed her usual fresh trimness, largely because she was going home.

This was August; her last trip home had been between Christmas and the New Year. She had sent a box from Germany at Easter, ties for the boys, silk scarves for Rebecca, books for Dad; and she had written Mother for her birthday in June, and enclosed an exquisite bit of lace in the letter; but although Victoria's illness had brought her to America nearly three months ago, it had somehow been impossible, she wrote them, to come home until now. Margaret had paid a great deal for the lace, as a sort of salve for her conscience—not that Mother would ever wear it!

Here was Weston. Weston looking its very ugliest in the level pitiless rays of the afternoon sun. The town, like most of its inhabitants, was wilted and grimed after the burden and heat of the long summer day. Margaret carried her heavy suitcase slowly up Main Street. Shop windows were spotted and dusty, and shopkeepers, standing idle in their doorways, looked spotted and dusty, too. A cloud of flies fought and surged about the closely guarded door of the butcher shop; a delivery cart was at the curb, the discouraged horse switching an ineffectual tail.

As Margaret passed this cart, a tall boy of fourteen came out of the shop with a bang of the wire-netting door, and slid a basket into the back of the cart.

"Teddy!" said Margaret, iritation evident in her voice in spite of herself.

"Hello, Mark!" said her brother, delightedly. "Say, great to see you! Get in on the four-ten?"

"Ted," said Margaret, kissing him, as the Pagets always quite simply kissed each other when they met, "what are you driving Costello's cart for?"

"Like to," said Theodore, simply. "Mother doesn't care. Say, you look swell, Mark!"

"What makes you want to drive this horrid cart, Ted?" protested Margaret. "What does Costello pay you?"

"Pay me?" scowled her brother, gathering up the reins. "Oh, come out of it, Marg'ret! He doesn't pay me anything. Don't you make Mother stop me, either, will you?" he ended anxiously.

"Of course I won't!" Margaret said impatiently.

"Giddap, Ruth!" said Theodore; but departing, he pulled up to add cheerfully, "Say, Dad didn't get his raise."

"Did?" said Margaret, brightening.

"*Didn't!*" He grinned affectionately upon her as with a dislocating jerk the cart started a ricocheting career down the street with that abandon known only to butchers' carts. Margaret, changing her heavy suitcase to the rested arm, was still vexedly watching it, when two girls, laughing in the open doorway of the express company's office across the street, caught sight of her. One of them, a little vision of pink hat and ruffles, and dark eyes and hair, came running to join her.

Rebecca was now sixteen, and of all the handsome Pagets the best to look upon. She was dressed according to her youthful lights; every separate article of her apparel today, from her rowdyish little hat to her openwork hose, represented a battle with Mrs Paget's preconceived ideas as to propriety in dress, with the honors largely for Rebecca. Rebecca had grown up, in eight months, her sister thought, confusedly; she was no longer the adorable, unself-conscious tomboy who fought and skated and tobogganed with the boys.

"Hello, darling dear!" said Rebecca. "Too bad no one met you! We all thought you were coming on the six. Crazy about your suit! Here's Maudie Pratt. You know Maudie, don't you, Mark?"

Margaret knew Maudie. Rebecca's infatuation for plain, heavy-featured, complacent Miss Pratt was a standing mystery in the Paget family. Margaret smiled, bowed.

"I think we stumbled upon a pretty little secret of yours today, Miss Margaret," said Maudie, with her best company manner, as they walked along. Margaret raised her eyebrows. "Rebel and I," Maudie went on—Rebecca was at the age that seeks a piquant substitute for an unpoetical family name—"Rebel and I are wondering if we may ask you who Mr John Tenison is?"

John Tenison! Margaret's heart stood still with a shock almost sickening, then beat furiously. What—how—who on earth had told them anything of John Tenison? Coloring high, she looked sharply at Rebecca.

"Cheer up, angel," said Rebecca, "he's not dead. He sent a telegram today, and Mother opened it——"

"Naturally," said Margaret, concealing an agony of impatience, as Rebecca paused apologetically.

"He's with his aunt, at Dayton, up the road here," continued Rebecca; "and wants you to wire him if he may come down and spend tomorrow here."

Margaret drew a relieved breath. There was time to turn around, at least.

"Who is he, sis?" asked Rebecca.

"Why, he's an awfully clever professor, honey," Margaret answered serenely. "We heard him lecture in Germany this spring, and met him afterward. I liked him very much. He's tremendously interesting." She tried to keep out of her voice the thrill that shook her at the mere thought of him. Confused pain and pleasure stirred her to the very heart. He wanted to come to see her, he must have telephoned Mrs Carr-Boldt and asked to call, or he would not have known that she was at home this week-end—surely that was significant, surely that meant something! The thought was all pleasure, so great a joy and pride indeed that Margaret was conscious of wanting to lay it aside, to think of, dream of, ponder over, when she was alone. But, on the other hand, there was instantly the miserable conviction that he mustn't be allowed to come to Weston, no—no—she couldn't have him see her home and her people on a crowed hot summer Sunday, when the town looked its ugliest, and the children were home from school, and when the scramble to get to church and to safely accomplish the one o'clock dinner exhausted the women of the family. And how could she keep him from coming, what excuse could she give?

"Don't you want him to come—is he old and fussy?" asked Rebecca interestedly.

"I'll see," Margaret answered vaguely. "No, he's only thirty-two or four."

"*And* charming!" said Maudie archly. Margaret eyed her with a coolness worthy of Mrs Carr-Boldt herself, and then turned rather pointedly to Rebecca.

"How's Mother, Becky?"

"Oh, she's fine!" Rebecca said, absently in her turn. When Maudie left them at the next corner, she said quickly:

"Mark, did you see where we were when I saw you?"

"At the express office——? Yes," Margaret said, surprised.

"Well, listen," said Rebecca, reddening. "Don't say anything to Mother about it, will you? She thinks those boys are fresh in there—she don't like me to go in!"

"Oh, Beck—then you oughtn't!" Margaret protested.

"Well, I wasn't!" Rebecca said uncomfortably. "We went to see if Maudie's racket had come. You won't—will you, Mark?"

"Tell Mother—no, I won't," Margaret said, with a long sigh. She looked sideways at Rebecca—the dainty, fast-forming little figure, the even ripple and curl of her plaited hair, the assured pose of the pretty head. Victoria Carr-Boldt, just Rebecca's age, was a big schoolgirl still

self-conscious and inarticulate, her well-groomed hair in an unbecoming "club," her well-hung skirts unbecomingly short. Margaret had half expected to find Rebecca at the same stage of development.

Rebecca was cheerful now, the promise exacted, and cheerfully observed:

"Dad didn't get his raise—isn't that the limit?"

Margaret sighed again, shrugged wearily. They were in their own quiet side street now, a street lined with ugly, shabby houses and beautified by magnificent old elms and maples. The Pagets' own particular gate was weather-peeled, the lawn trampled and bare. A bulging wire-netting door gave on the shabby old hall Margaret knew so well; she went on into the familiar rooms, acutely conscious, as she always was for the first hour or two at home, of the bareness and ugliness everywhere—the old sofa that sagged in the seat, the scratched rockers, the bookcases overflowing with coverless magazines, and the old square piano half-buried under loose sheets of music.

Duncan sat on the piano bench—gloomily sawing at a violoncello. Robert—nine now, with all his pretty baby roundness gone, a lean little burned, peeling face, and big teeth missing when he smiled, stood in the bay window, twisting the already limp net curtains into a tight rope. Each boy gave Margaret a kiss that seemed curiously to taste of dust, sunburn, and freckles, before she followed a noise of hissing and voices to the kitchen to find Mother.

The kitchen, at five o'clock on Saturday afternoon, was in wild confusion, and insufferably hot. Margaret had a distinct impression that not a movable article therein was in place, and not an available inch of tables or chairs unused, before her eyes reached the tall figure of the woman in a gown of chocolate percale, who was frying cutlets at the big littered range. Her face was dark with heat and streaked with perspiration. She turned as Margaret entered, and gave a delighted cry.

"Well, there's my girl! Bless her heart! Look out for this spoon, lovely," she added immediately, giving the girl a guarded embrace. Tears of joy stood frankly in her fine eyes.

"I meant to have all of this out of the way, dear," apologized Mrs Paget, with a gesture that included cakes in the process of frosting, salad vegetables in the process of cooling, soup in the process of getting strained, great loaves of bread that sent a delicious fragrance over all the other odors. "But we didn't look for you until six."

"Oh, no matter!" Margaret said bravely.

"Rebecca tell you Dad didn't get his raise?" called Mrs Paget, in a voice that rose above the various noises of the kitchen. "Blanche!" she protested, "can't that wait?" for the old negress had begun to crack ice with deafening smashes. But Blanche did not hear, so Mrs Paget continued loudly: "Dad saw Redman himself; he'll tell you about it! Don't stay in the kitchen in that pretty dress, dear! I'm coming right upstairs."

It was very hot upstairs; the bedrooms smelled faintly of matting, the

soap in the bathroom was shriveled in its saucer. In Margaret's old room the week's washing had been piled high on the bed. She took off her hat and linen coat, brushed her hair back from her face, flinging her head back and shutting her eyes the better to fight tears as she did so, and began to assort the collars and shirts and put them away. For Dad's bureau—for Bruce's bureau—for the boys' bureau, tablecloths to go downstairs, towels for the shelves in the bathroom. Two little shirt-waists for Rebecca with little holes torn through them where collar and belt pins belonged.

Her last journey took her to the big, third-story room where the three younger boys slept. The three narrow beds were still unmade, and the western sunlight poured over tumbled blankets and the scattered small possessions that seem to ooze from the pores of little boys. Margaret set her lips distastefully, as she brought order out of chaos. It was all wrong, somehow, she thought, gathering handkerchiefs and matches and "Nick Carters" and the oiled paper that had wrapped caramels from under the pillows that would in a few hours harbor a fresh supply.

She went out on the porch in time to put her arms about her father's shabby shoulders when he came in. Mr Paget was tired, and he told his wife and daughters that he thought he was a very sick man. Margaret's mother met this statement with an anxious solicitude that was very soothing to the sufferer. She made Mark get Daddy his slippers and loose coat, and suggested that Rebecca shake up the dining-room couch before she established him there, in a rampart of pillows. No outsider would have dreamed that Mrs Paget had dealt with this exact emergency some hundreds of times in the past twenty years.

Mr Paget, reclining, shut his eyes, remarked that he had had an "awful, awful day," and wondered faintly if it would be too much trouble to have "somebody" make him just a little milk toast for his dinner. He smiled at Margaret when she sat down beside him; all the children were dear, but the oldest daughter knew she came first with her father.

"Getting to be an old, old man!" he said wearily, and Margaret hated herself because she had to quell an impatient impulse to tell him he was merely tired and cross and hungry, before she could say, in the proper soothing tone, "Don't talk that way, Dad darling!" She had to listen to a long account of the "raise," wincing every time her father emphasized the difference between her own position and that of her employer. Dad was at least the equal of any one in Weston! Why, a man Dad's age oughtn't to be humbly asking a raise, he ought to be dictating now. It was just Dad's way of looking at things, and it was all wrong.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing!" said Rebecca, who had come in with a brimming soup plate of milk toast, "Joe Redman gave a picnic last month, and he came here with his mother, in the car, to ask me. And I was the scornfullest thing you ever saw, wasn't I, Ted? Not much!"

"Oh, Beck, you oughtn't to mix social and business things that way!" Margaret said helplessly.

"Dinner!" screamed the nine-year-old Robert, breaking into the room at this point, and "Dinner!" said Mrs Paget, wearily, cheerfully, from the chair into which she had dropped at the head of the table. Mr Paget, revived by sympathy, milk toast, and Rebecca's attentions, took his place at the foot, and Bruce the chair between Margaret and his mother. Like the younger boys, whose almost confluent freckles had been brought into unusual prominence by violently applied soap and water, and whose hair dripped on their collars, he had brushed up for dinner, but his negligee shirt and corduroy trousers were stained and spotted from machine oil. Margaret, comparing him secretly to the men she knew, as daintily groomed as women, in their spotless white, felt a little resentment that Bruce's tired face was so contented, and said to herself again that it was all wrong.

Dinner was the same old haphazard meal with which she was so familiar; Blanche supplying an occasional reproof to the boys, Ted ignoring his vegetables, and ready in an incredibly short time for a second cutlet, and Robert begging for corn syrup, immediately after the soup, and spilling it from his bread. Mrs Paget was flushed, her disappearances kitchenward frequent. She wanted Margaret to tell her all about Mr Tenison. Margaret laughed, and said there was nothing to tell.

"You might get a horse and buggy from Peterson's," suggested Mrs Paget, interestedly, "and drive about after dinner."

"Oh, Mother, I don't think I had better let him come!" Margaret said. "There's so many of us, and such confusion, on Sunday! Ju and Harry are almost sure to come over."

"Yes, I guess they will," Mrs Paget said, with her sudden radiant smile. "Ju is so dear in her little house, and Harry's so sweet with her," she went on with vivacity. "Daddy and I had dinner with them Tuesday. Bruce said Rebecca was lovely with the boys—we're going to Julie's again some time. I declare it's so long since we've been anywhere without the children that we both felt funny. It was a lovely evening."

"You're too much tied, Mother," Margaret said affectionately.

"Not now!" her mother protested radiantly. "With all my babies turning into men and women so fast. And I'll have you all together tomorrow —and your friend I hope, too, Mark," she added hospitably. "You had better let him come, dear. There's a big dinner, and I always freeze more cream than we need, anyway, because Daddy likes a plate of it about four o'clock, if there's any left."

"Well—but there's nothing to do," Margaret protested.

"No, but dinner takes quite a while," Mrs Paget suggested a little doubtfully; "and we could have a nice talk on the porch, and then you could go driving or walking. I wish there *was* something cool and pleasant to do, Mark," she finished a little wistfully. "You do just as you think best about asking him to come."

"I think I'll wire him that another time would be better," said Margaret, slowly. "Some time we'll regularly arrange for it."

"Well, perhaps that would be best," her mother agreed. "Some other time we'll send the boys off before dinner, and have things all nice and quiet. In October, say, when the trees are so pretty. I don't know but what that's my favorite time of all the year!"

Margaret looked at her as if she found something new in the tired, bright face. She could not understand why her mother—still too heated to commence eating her dinner—should radiate so definite an atmosphere of content, as she sat back a little breathless, after the flurry of serving. She herself felt injured and sore, not at the mere disappointment it caused her to put off John Tenison's visit, but because she felt more acutely than ever tonight the difference between his position and her own.

"Something nice has happened, Mother?" she hazarded, entering with an effort into the older woman's mood.

"Nothing special." Her mother's happy eyes ranged about the circle of young faces. "But it's so lovely to have you here, and to have Ju coming tomorrow," she said. "I just wish Daddy could build a house for each one of you, as you marry and settle down, right around our house in a circle, as they say people do sometimes in the Old World. I think then I'd have nothing in life to wish for!"

"Oh, Mother—in Weston!" Margaret said hopelessly, but her mother did not catch it.

"Not, Mark," she went on hastily and earnestly, "that I'm not more than grateful to God for all His goodness, as it is! I look at other women, and I wonder, I wonder—what I have done to be so blessed! Mark—" her face suddenly glowed, she leaned a little toward her daughter, "dearie, I *must* tell you," she said; "it's about Ju——"

Their eyes met in the pause.

"Mother—really?" Margaret said slowly.

"She told me on Tuesday," Mrs Paget said, with glistening eyes. "Now, not a word to any one, Mark—but she'll want you to know!"

"And is she glad?" Margaret said, unable to rejoice.

"Glad?" Mrs Paget echoed, her face gladness itself.

"Well, Ju's so young—just twenty one," Margaret submitted a little uncertainly; "and she's been so free—and they're *just* in the new house! And I thought they were going to Europe!"

"Oh, Europe!" Mrs Paget dismissed it cheerfully. "Why, it's the happiest time in a woman's life, Mark! Or I don't know, though," she went on thoughtfully, "I don't know but what I was happiest when you were all tiny, tumbling about me, and climbing into my lap. . . . Why, you love children, dear," she finished, with a shade of reproach in her voice, as Margaret still looked sober.

"Yes, I know, Mother," Margaret said. "But Julie's only got the one maid, and I don't suppose they can have another. I hope to goodness Ju won't get herself all run down!"

Her mother laughed. "You remind me of Grandma Paget," said she, cheerfully; "she lived ten miles away when we were married, but she came in when Bruce was born. She was rather a proud, cold woman herself, but she was very sweet to me. Well, then little Charlie came, fourteen months later, and she took that very seriously. Mother was dead, you know, and she stayed with me again, and worried me half sick telling me that it wasn't fair to Bruce and it wasn't fair to Charlie to divide my time between them that way. Well, then when my third baby was coming, I didn't dare tell her. Dad kept telling me to, and I couldn't, because I knew what a calamity a third would seem to her! Finally she went to visit Aunt Rebecca out West, and it was the very day she got back that the baby came. She came upstairs—she'd come right up from the train, and not seen any one but Dad; and he wasn't very intelligible, I guess—and she sat down and took the baby in her arms, and says she, looking at me sort of patiently, yet as if she was exasperated, too: 'Well, this is a nice way to do, the minute my back's turned! What are you going to call him, Julia?' And I said, 'I'm going to call her Margaret, for my dear husband's mother, and she's going to be beautiful and good, and grow up to marry the President!" Mrs Paget's merry laugh rang out. "I never shall forget your grandmother's face.

"Just the same," Mrs Paget added, with a sudden deep sigh, "when little Charlie left us, the next year, and Brucie and Dad were both so ill, she and I agreed that you—you were just talking and trying to walk—were the only comfort we had! I could wish my girls no greater happiness than my children have been to me," finished Mother, contentedly.

"I know," Margaret began, half angrily; "but what about the children?" she was going to add. But somehow the arguments she had used so plausibly did not utter themselves easily to Mother, whose children would carry into their own middle age a wholesome dread of her anger. Margaret faltered, and merely scowled.

"I don't like to see that expression on your face, dearie," her mother said, as she might have said it to an eight-year-old child. "Be my sweet girl! Why, marriage isn't marriage without children, Mark. I've been thinking all week of having a baby in my arms again—it's so long since Rob was a baby."

Margaret devoted herself, with a rather sullen face, to her dessert. Mother would never feel as she did about these things, and what was the use of arguing? In the silence she heard her father speak loudly and suddenly.

"I am not in a position to have my children squander money on concerts and candy," he said. Margaret forgot her own grievance, and looked up. The boys looked resentful and gloomy; Rebecca was flushed, her eyes dropped, her lips trembling with disappointment.

"I had promised to take them to the Elks' Concert and dance," Mrs Paget interpreted hastily. "But now Dad says the Bakers are coming over to play whist."

"Is it going to be a good show, Ted?" Margaret asked.

"Oh," Rebecca flashed into instant glowing response. "It's going to be a *dandy!* Every one's going to be there! Ford Patterson is going to do a monologue—he's as good as a professional!—and George is going to send up a bunch of carrots and parsnips! And the Weston Male Quartette, Mark, and a playlet by the Hunt's Crossing Amateur Theatrical Society!"

"Oh—oh!" Margaret mimicked the eager rush of words. "Let me take them, Dad," she pleaded, "if it's going to be as fine as all that! I'll stand treat for the crowd."

"Oh, Mark, you darling!" burst from the rapturous Rebecca.

"Say, gee, we've got to get there early!" Theodore warned them, finishing his pudding with one mammoth spoonful.

"If you take them, my dear," Mr Paget said graciously, "of course Mother and I are quite satisfied."

"I'll hold Robert by one ear and Rebecca by another," Margaret promised; "and if she so much as dares to look at George or Ted or Jimmy Barr or Paul, I'll——"

"Oh, Jimmie belongs to Louise, now," said Rebecca, radiantly. There was a joyous shout of laughter from the light-hearted juniors, and Rebecca, seeing her artless admission too late, turned scarlet while she laughed. Dinner broke up in confusion, as dinner at home always did, and everybody straggled upstairs to dress.

Margaret, changing her dress in a room that was insufferably hot, because the shades must be down, and the gas-lights as high as possible, reflected that another forty-eight hours would see her speeding back to the world of cool, awninged interiors, uniformed maids, the clink of iced glasses, the flash of white sails on blue water. She could surely afford for that time to be patient and sweet. She lifted Rebecca's starched petticoat from the bed to give Mother a seat, when Mother came rather wearily in to watch them.

"Sweet girl to take them, Mark," said Mother, appreciatively. "I was going to ask Brucie. But he's gone to bed, poor fellow; he's worn out tonight."

"He had a letter from Ned Gunther this morning," said Rebecca, cheerfully—powdering the tip of her pretty nose, her eyes almost crossed with concentration—"and I think it made him blue all day."

"Ned Gunther?" said Margaret.

"Chum at college," Rebecca elucidated, "a lot of them are going to Honolulu, just for this month, and of course they wanted Bruce. Mark, does that show?"

Margaret's heart ached for the beloved brother's disappointment. There it was again, all wrong! Before she left the house with the rioting youngsters, she ran upstairs to his room. Bruce, surrounded by scientific magazines, a drop-light with a vivid green shade over his shoulder, looked up with a welcoming smile.

"Sit down and talk, Mark," said he.

Margaret explained her hurry.

"Bruce—this isn't much fun!" she said, looking about the room with its shabby dresser and worn carpet. "Why aren't you going to the concert?"

"Is there a concert?" he asked, surprised.

"Why, didn't you hear us talking at dinner? The Elks, you know."

"Well—sure! I meant to go to that. I forgot it was tonight," he said, with his lazy smile. "I came home all in, forgot everything."

"Oh, come!" Margaret urged, as eagerly as Rebecca ever did. "It's early, Bruce, come on! You don't have to shave! We'll hold a seat—come on!"

"Sure, I will!" he said, suddenly roused. The magazines rapped on the floor, and Margaret had barely shut the door behind her when she heard his bare feet follow them.

It was like old times to sit next to him through the hot merry evening, while Rebecca glowed like a little rose among her friends, and the smaller boys tickled her ear with their whispered comments. Margaret had sent a telegram to Professor Tenison, and felt relieved that at least that strain was spared her. She even danced with Bruce after the concert, and with one or two old friends.

Afterward they strolled back slowly through the inky summer dark, finding the house hot and close when they came in. Margaret went upstairs, hearing her mother's apologetic, "Oh, Dad, why didn't I give you back your club?" as she passed the dining-room door. She knew Mother hated whist, and wondered rather irritably why she played it. The Paget family was slow to settle down. Robert became tearful and whining before he was finally bumped protesting into bed. Theodore and Duncan prolonged their ablutions until the noise of shouting, splashing, and thumping in the bathroom brought Mother to the foot of the stairs. Rebecca was conversational. She lay with her slender arms locked behind her head on the pillow, and talked, as Julie had talked on that memorable night five years ago. Margaret, restless in the hot darkness, wondering whether the maddening little shaft of light from the hall gas was annoying enough to warrant the effort of getting up and extinguishing it, listened and listened.

Rebecca wanted to join the Stage Club, but Mother wouldn't let her unless Bruce did. Rebecca belonged to the Progressive Diners. Did Mark suppose Mother'd think she was crazy if she asked the family not to be in evidence when the crowd came to the house for the salad course? And Rebecca wanted to write to Bruce's chum, not regularly, you know, Mark, but just now and then, he was so nice! And Mother didn't like the idea. Margaret was obviously supposed to lend a hand with these interesting tangles.

". . . and I said, 'Certainly not! I won't unmask at all, if it comes to that!' . . . And imagine that elegant fellow carrying my old books and

my skates! So I wrote, and Maudie and I decided. . . . And Mark, if it wasn't a perfectly *gorgeous* box of roses! . . . That old, old dimity, but Mother pressed and freshened it up. . . . Not that I want to marry him, or any one. . . ."

Margaret wakened from uneasy drowsing with a start. The hall was dark now, the room cooler. Rebecca was asleep. Hands, hands she knew well, were drawing a light covering over her shoulders. She opened her eyes to see her mother.

"I've been wondering if you're disappointed about your friend not coming tomorrow, Mark?" said the tender voice.

"Oh, no-o!" said Margaret, hardily. "Mother—why are you up so late?"

"Just going to bed," said the other, soothingly. "Blanche forgot to put the oatmeal into the cooker, and I went down-stairs again. I'll say my prayers in here."

Margaret went off to sleep again, as she had so many hundred times before, with her mother kneeling beside her.

CHAPTER VII

It seemed but a few moments before the blazing Sunday was precipitated upon them, and everybody was late for everything.

The kitchen was filled with the smoke from hot griddles blue in the sunshine when Margaret went downstairs; and in the dining-room the same merciless light fell upon the sticky syrup pitcher, and upon the stains on the tablecloth. Cream had been brought in in the bottle, the bread tray was heaped with orange skins, and the rolls piled on the tablecloth. Bruce, who had already been to church with Mother and was off for a day's sail, was dividing his attention between Robert and his watch. Rebecca, daintily busy with the special cup and plate that were one of her little affectations, was all ready for the day, except as to dress, wearing a thin little kimono over her blue ribbons and starched embroideries. Mother was putting up a little lunch for Bruce. Confusion reigned. The younger boys were urged to hurry, if they wanted to make the "nine." Rebecca was going to wait for the "half-past ten," because the "kids sang at nine, and it was fierce." Mr Paget and his sons departed together, and the girls went upstairs for a hot, tiring tussle with beds and dusting before starting for church. They left their mother busy with the cream freezer in the kitchen. It was very hot even then.

But it was still hotter, walking home in the burning midday stillness. A group of young people waited lazily for letters, under the trees outside the post-office door. Otherwise the main street was deserted. A languid little breeze brought the far echoes of pianos and phonographs from this direction and that.

"Who's that on the porch?" said Rebecca, suddenly, as they neared

home, instantly finding the stranger among her father and the boys. Margaret, glancing up sharply, saw, almost with a sensation of sickness, the big, ungainly figure, the beaming smile, and the shock of dark hair that belonged to nobody else in the world but John Tenison. A stony chill settled about her heart as she went up the steps and gave him her hand.

Oh, if he only couldn't stay to dinner, she prayed. Oh, if only he could spare them time for no more than a flying visit! With a sinking heart she smiled her greetings.

"Doctor Tenison—this is very nice of you!" Margaret said. "Have you met my father—my small brothers?"

"We have been having a great talk," said John Tenison, genially, "and this young man"—he indicated Robert—"has been showing me the colored supplement of the paper. I didn't have any word from you, Miss Paget," he went on, "so I took the chance of finding you. And your mother has assured me that I will not put her out by staying to have luncheon with you."

"Oh, that's nice!" Margaret said mechanically, trying to dislodge Robert from the most comfortable chair by a significant touch of her fingers on his small shoulder. Robert perfectly understood that she wanted the chair, but continued in absorbed study of the comic supplement, merely wriggling resentfully at Margaret's touch. Margaret, at the moment, would have been glad to use violence on the stubborn, serene little figure. When he was finally dislodged, she sat down, still flushed from her walk and the nervousness Doctor Tenison's arrival caused her, and tried to bring the conversation into a normal channel. But an interruption occurred in the arrival of Harry and Julie in the runabout; the little boys swarmed down to examine it. Julie, very pretty, with a perceptible little new air of dignity, went upstairs to freshen hair and gown, and Harry, pushing his straw hat back the better to mop his forehead, immediately engaged Doctor Tenison's attention with the details of what sounded to Margaret like a particularly uninteresting operation, which he had witnessed the day before.

Utterly discouraged, and acutely wretched, Margaret presently slipped away, and went into the kitchen, to lend a hand with the dinner preparations if help was needed. The room presented a scene if possible a little more confused than that of the day before, and was certainly hotter. Her mother, flushed and hurried, in a fresh but rather unbecoming gingham, was putting up a cold supper for the younger boys, who, having duly attended to their religious duties, were to take a long afternoon tramp, with a possible interval of fishing. She buttered each slice of the great loaf before she cut it, and lifted it carefully on the knife before beginning the next slice. An opened pot of jam stood at her elbow. A tin cup and the boys' fishing-gear lay on a chair. Theodore and Duncan themselves hung over these preparations; never apparently helping themselves to food, yet never with empty mouths. Blanche, moaning

"The Palms" with the insistence of one who wishes to show her entire familiarity with a melody, was at the range.

Roast veal, instead of the smothered chickens her mother had so often, and cooked so deliciously, a mountain of mashed potato—corn on the cob, and an enormous heavy salad mantled with mayonnaise—Margaret could have wept over the hopelessly plebeian dinner!

"Mother, mayn't I get down the fingerbowls," she asked; "and mayn't we have black coffee in the silver pot, afterward?"

Mrs Paget looked absently at her for a dubious second. "I don't like to ask Blanche to wash all that extra glass," she said, in an undertone, adding briskly to Theodore, "No, no, Ted! You can't have all that cake. Half that!" and to Blanche herself, "Don't leave the door open when you go in, Blanche; I just drove all the flies out of the dining-room." Then she returned to Margaret with a cordial: "Why, certainly, dear! Any one who wants coffee, after tea, can have it! Dad always wants his cup of tea."

"Nobody but us ever serves tea with dinner!" Margaret muttered; but her mother did not hear it. She buckled the strap of the lunch box, straightened her back with an air of relief, and pushed down her rolled-up sleeves.

"Don't lose that napkin, Ted," said she, and receiving the boy's grateful kiss haphazard between her hair and forehead, she added affectionately: "You're more than welcome, dear! We're all ready, Mark—go and tell them, dear! All right, Blanche."

Ruffled and angry, Margaret went to summon the others to dinner. Maudie had joined them on the porch now, and had been urged to stay, and was already trying her youthful wiles on the professor.

"Well, he'll have to leave on the five o'clock!" Margaret reflected, steeled to bitter endurance until that time. For everything went wrong, and dinner was one long nightmare for her. Professor Tenison's napkin turned out to be a traycloth. Blanche, asked for another, disappeared for several minutes, and returned without it, to whisper in Mrs Paget's ear. Mrs Paget immediately sent her own fresh napkin to the guest. The incident, or something in their murmured conversation, gave Rebecca and Maudie "the giggles." There seemed an exhausting amount of passing and repassing of plates. The room was hot, the supply of ice insufficient. Mr Paget dwelt on his favorite grievance—"the old man isn't needed, these days. They're getting all young fellows into the bank. They put young college fellows in there who are getting pretty near the money I am—after twenty-five years!" In any pause, Mrs Paget could be heard, patiently dissuading little Robert from his fixed intention of accompanying the older boys on their walk, whether invited or uninvited.

John Tenison behaved charmingly, eating his dinner with enjoyment, looking interestedly from one face to the other, sympathetic, alert, and amused. But Margaret writhed in spirit at what he must be thinking.

Finally the ice cream, in a melting condition, and the chocolate cake, very sticky, made their appearance; and although these were regular Sunday treats, the boys felt called upon to cheer. Julie asked her mother in an audible undertone if she "ought" to eat cake. Doctor Tenison produced an enormous box of chocolates, and Margaret was disgusted with the frantic scramble her brothers made to secure them.

"If you're going for a walk, dear," her mother said, when the meal was over, "you'd better *go*. It's almost three now."

"I don't know whether we will, it's so hot," Margaret said, in an indifferent tone, but she could easily have broken into disheartened tears.

"Oh, go," Julie urged, "it's much cooler out." They were up in Margaret's old room, Mrs Paget tying a big apron about Julie's ruffled frock, preparatory to an attack upon the demoralized kitchen. "We think he's lovely," the little matron went on approvingly. "Don't fall in love with him, Mark."

"Why not?" Margaret said carelessly, pinning on her hat.

"Well, I don't imagine he's a marrying man," said the young authority, wisely. Margaret flushed, and was angry at herself for flushing. But when Mrs Paget had gone downstairs, Julie came very simply and charmingly over to her sister, and standing close beside her with embarrassed eyes on her own hand—very youthful in its plain ring—as she played with the bureau furnishing, she said:

"Mother tell you?"

Margaret looked down at the flushed face.

"Are you sorry, Ju?"

"Sorry!" The conscious eyes flashed into view. *"Sorry!"* Julie echoed in astonishment. "Why, Mark," she said dreamily—there was no affectation of maturity in her manner now, and it was all the more impressive for that. "Why, Mark," said she, "it's—it's the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me! I think and think"—her voice dropped very low—"of holding it in my arms—mine and Harry's, you know—and of its little face!"

Margaret, stirred, kissed the wet lashes.

"Ju, but you're so young—you're such a baby yourself!" she said.

"And, Mark," Julie said, unheeding, "you know what Harry and I are going to call her, if it's a girl? Not for Mother, for it's so confusing to have two Julias, but for you! Because," her arms went about her sister, "you've always been such a darling to me, Mark!"

Margaret went downstairs very thoughtfully, and out into the silent Sunday streets. Where they walked, or what they talked of, she did not know. She knew that her head ached, and that the village looked very commonplace, and that the day was very hot. She found it more painful than sweet to be strolling along beside the big, loose-jointed figure, and to send an occasional side glance to John Tenison's earnest face, which wore its pleasantest expression now. Ah, well, it would be all over at five o'clock, she said wearily to herself, and she could go home and lie down

with her aching head in a darkened room, and try not to think what today *might* have been. Try not to think of the dainty little luncheon Annie would have given them at Mrs Carr-Boldt's, of the luxurious choice of amusements afterward: motoring over the lovely country roads, rowing on the wide still water, watching the tennis courts, or simply resting in deep chairs on the sweep of velvet lawn above the river.

She came out of a reverie to find Doctor Tenison glancing calmly up from his watch.

"The train was five o'clock, was it?" he said. "I've missed it!"

"Missed it!" Margaret echoed blankly. Then, as the horrible possibility dawned upon her, "Oh, *no!*"

"Oh, yes—bad as that!" he said, laughing at her.

Poor Margaret, fighting despair, struggled to recover herself.

"Well, I thought it might have been important to you!" she said, laughing quite naturally. "There's a seven-six, but it stops everywhere, and a ten-thirty. The ten-thirty is best, because supper's apt to be a little late."

"The ten-thirty," Doctor Tenison echoed contentedly. Margaret's heart sank—five more hours of the struggle! "But perhaps that's an imposition," he said. "Isn't there a tearoom—isn't there an inn here where we could have a bite?"

"We aren't in Berlin," Margaret reminded him cheerfully. "There's a hotel—but Mother would never forgive me for leading any one *there!* No, we'll take that little walk I told you of, and Mother will give us something to eat later. Perhaps if we're late enough," she added to herself, "we can have just tea and bread and jam alone, after the others."

Suddenly, unreasonably, she felt philosophical and gay. The little episode of missing the train had given her the old dear feeling of adventure and comradeship again. Things couldn't be any worse than they had been at noon, anyway. The experience had been thoroughly disenchanting. What did a few hours, more or less, matter! Let him be disgusted if he wanted to, she couldn't help it!

It was cooler now, the level late shadows were making even Weston pretty. They went up a steep shady lane to the old graveyard, and wandered, peacefully, contentedly, among the old graves. Margaret gathered her thin gown from contact with the tangled, uncut grass: they had to disturb a flock of nibbling sheep to cross to the crumbling wall. Leaning on the uneven stones that formed it, they looked down at the roofs of the village, half lost in tree tops; and listened to the barking of dogs, and the shrill voices of children. The sun sank, lower, lower. There was a feeling of dew in the air as they went slowly home.

When, at seven o'clock, they opened the gate, they found on the side porch only Rebecca, enchanting in something pink and dotted, Mother, and Dad.

"Lucky we waited!" said Rebecca, rising, and signaling some word-

less message to Margaret that required dimples, widened eyes, compressed lips, and an expression of utter secrecy. "Supper's all ready," she added casually.

"Where are the others?" Margaret said, experiencing the most pleasant sensation she had had in twenty-four hours.

"Ju and Harry went home, Rob's at George's, boys walking," said Rebecca, briefly, still dimpling mysteriously with additional information. She gave Margaret an eloquent side glance as she led the way into the dining-room. At the doorway Margaret stopped, astounded.

The room was hardly recognizable now. It was cool and delightful, with the diminished table daintily set for five. The old silver candlesticks and silver teapot presided over blue bowls of berries and the choicest of Mother's preserved fruits. Some one had found time to put fresh parsley about the Canton platter of cold meats, some one had made a special trip to Mrs O'Brien's for the cream that filled the Wedgwood pitcher. Margaret felt tears press suddenly against her eyes.

"Oh, Beck!" she could only stammer when the sisters went into the kitchen for hot water and tea biscuit.

"Mother did it," said Rebecca, returning her hug with fervor. "She gave us all an awful talking to after you left! She said here was dear old Mark, who always worked herself to death for us, trying to make a nice impression, and to have things go smoothly, and we were all acting like Indians, and everything so confused at dinner, and hot and noisy! So, later, when Paul and I and the others were walking, we saw you and Doctor Tenison going up toward the graveyard, and I tore home and told Mother he'd missed the five and would be back; it was after five then, and we just flew!"

It was all like a pleasant awakening after a troubled dream. As Margaret took her place at the little feast she felt an exquisite sensation of peace and content sink into her heart. Mother was so gracious and charming, behind the urn; Rebecca irresistible in her admiration of the famous professor. Her father was his sweetest self, delightfully reminiscent of his boyhood, and his visit to the White House in Lincoln's day, with "my uncle, the judge." But it was to her mother's face that Margaret's eyes returned most often; she wanted—she was vaguely conscious that she wanted—to get away from the voices and laughter, and think about Mother. How sweet she was, just sweet, and after all, how few people were that in this world! They were clever, and witty, and rich—plenty of them, but how little sweetness there was! How few faces, like her mother's, did not show a line that was not all tenderness and goodness.

They laughed over their teacups like old friends; the professor and Rebecca shouting joyously together, Mr Paget one broad twinkle, Mrs Paget radiantly reflecting, as she always did reflect, the others' mood. It was a memorably happy hour.

And after tea they sat on the porch, and the stars came out, and pres-

ently the moon sent silver shafts through the dark foliage of the trees. Little Rob came home, and climbed silently, contentedly, into his father's lap.

"Sing something, Mark," said Dad, then; and Margaret, sitting on the steps with her head against her mother's knee, found it very simple to begin in the darkness one of the old songs he loved:

"Don't you cry, ma honey,
Don't you weep no more."

Rebecca, sitting on the rail, one slender arm flung above her head about the pillar, joined her own young voice to Margaret's sweet and steady one. The others hummed a little. John Tenison, sitting watching them, his locked hands hanging between his knees, saw in the moonlight a sudden glitter on the mother's cheek.

Presently Bruce, tired and happy and sunburned, came through the splashed silver-and-black of the street to sit by Margaret, and put his arm about her; and the younger boys, returning full of the day's great deeds, spread themselves comfortably over the lower steps. Before long all their happy voices rose together, on "Believe me," and "Working on the Railroad," and "Seeing Nellie Home," and a dozen more of the old songs that young people have sung for half a century in the summer moonlight.

And then it was time to say good-night to Professor Tenison. "Come again, sir!" said Mr Paget, heartily; the boys slid their hands, still faintly suggestive of fish, cordially into his; Rebecca promised to mail him a certain discussed variety of fern the very next day; Bruce's voice sounded all hearty good-will as he hoped that he wouldn't miss Doctor Tenison's next visit. Mrs Paget, her hand in his, raised keen, almost anxious eyes to his face.

"But surely you'll be down our way again?" said she, unsmilingly.

"Oh, surely." The professor was unable to keep his eyes from moving toward Margaret, and the mother saw it.

"Good-by for the present, then," she said, still very gravely.

"Good-by, Mrs Paget," said Doctor Tenison. "It's been an inestimable privilege to meet you all. I haven't ever had a happier day."

Margaret, used to the extravagant speeches of another world, thought this merely very charming politeness. But her heart sang as they walked away together. He liked them—he had had a nice time!

"Now I know what makes you so different from other women," said John Tenison, when he and Margaret were alone. "It's having that wonderful mother! She—she—well, she's one woman in a million; I don't have to tell you that! It's something to thank God for, a mother like that; it's a privilege to know her. I've been watching her all day, and I've been wondering what *she* gets out of it—that was what puzzled me; but now, just now, I've found out! This morning, thinking what her life is, I

couldn't see what *repaid* her, do you see? What made up to her for the unending, unending effort, and sacrifice, the pouring out of love and sympathy and help—year after year after year. . . ."

He hesitated, but Margaret did not speak.

"You know," he went on musingly, "in these days, when women just serenely ignore the question of children, or at most, as a special concession, bring up one or two—just the one or two whose expenses can be comfortably met!—there's something magnificent in a woman like your mother, who begins eight destinies instead of one! She doesn't strain and chafe to express herself through the medium of poetry or music or the stage, but she puts her whole splendid philosophy into her nursery—launches sound little bodies and minds that have their first growth cleanly and purely about her knees. Responsibility—that's what these other women say they are afraid of! But it seems to me there's no responsibility like that of decreeing that young lives simply *shall not be*. Why, what good is learning, or elegance of manner, or painfully acquired fineness of speech, and taste and point of view, if you are not going to distil it into the growing plants, the only real hope we have in the world! You know, Miss Paget," his smile was very sweet in the half darkness, "there's a higher tribunal than the social tribunal of this world, after all; and it seems to me that a woman who stands there, as your mother will, with a forest of new lives about her, and a record like hers, will—will find she has a Friend at court!" he finished whimsically.

They were at a lonely corner, and a garden fence offering Margaret a convenient support, she laid her arms suddenly upon the rosevine that covered it, and her face upon her arms, and cried as if her heart was broken.

"Why, why—my dear girl!" the professor said, aghast. He laid his hand on the shaking shoulders, but Margaret shook it off.

"I'm not what you think I am!" she sobbed out, incoherently. "I'm not different from other women; I'm just as selfish and bad and mean as the worst of them! And I'm not worthy to t-tie my m-mother's *shoes!*"

"Margaret!" John Tenison said unsteadily. And in a flash her drooping bright head was close to his lips, and both his big arms were about her. "You know I love you, don't you, Margaret?" he said hoarsely, over and over, with a sort of fierce intensity. "You know that, don't you? *Don't* you, Margaret?"

Margaret could not speak. Emotion swept her like a rising tide from all her familiar moorings; her heart thundered, there was a roaring in her ears. She was conscious of a wild desire to answer him, to say one hundredth part of all she felt; but she could only rest, breathless, against him, her frightened eyes held by the eyes so near, his arms about her.

"You do, don't you, Margaret?" he said more gently. "You love me, don't you? Don't you?"

And after a long time, or what seemed a long time, while they stood motionless in the summer night, with the great branches of the trees mov-

ing a little overhead, and garden scents creeping out on the damp air, Margaret said, with a sort of breathless catch in her voice:

"You *know* I do!" And with the words the fright left her eyes, and happy tears filled them, and she raised her face to his.

Coming back from the train half an hour later, she walked between a new heaven and a new earth! The friendly stars seemed just overhead; a thousand delicious odors came from garden beds and recently watered lawns. She moved through the confusion that always attended the settling down of the Pagets for the night like one in a dream, and was glad to find herself at last lying in the darkness beside the sleeping Rebecca again. Now, now, she could think!

But it was all too wonderful for reasonable thought. Margaret clasped both her hands against her rising heart. He loved her. She could think of the very words he had used in telling her, over and over again. She need no longer wonder and dream and despair: he had *said* it. He loved her, had loved her from the very first. His old aunt suspected it, and his chum suspected it, and he had thought Margaret knew it. And beside him in that brilliant career that she had followed so wistfully in her dreams, Margaret saw herself, *his wife*. Young and clever and good to look upon—yes, she was free tonight to admit herself all these good things for his sake!—and his wife, mounting as he mounted beside the one man in the world she had elected to admire and love. "Doctor and Mrs John Tenison"—so it would be written. "Doctor Tenison's wife"—"This is Mrs Tenison"—she seemed already to hear the magical sound of it!

Love—what a wonderful thing it was! How good God was to send this best of all gifts to her! She thought how it belittled the other good things of the world. She asked no more of life, now; she was loved by a good man, and a great man, and she was to be his wife. Ah, the happy years together that would date from tonight—Margaret was thrilling already to their delights. "For better or worse," the old words came to her with a new meaning. There would be no worse, she said to herself with sudden conviction—how could there be? Poverty, privation, sickness might come—but to bear them with John—to comfort and sustain him, to be shut away with him from all the world but the world of their own four walls—why, that would be the greatest happiness of all! What hardship could be hard that knitted their two hearts closer together; what road too steep if they essayed it hand in hand?

And that—her confused thoughts ran on—that was what had changed all life for Julie. She had forgotten Europe, forgotten all the idle ambitions of her girlhood, because she loved her husband; and now the new miracle was to come to her—the miracle of a child, the little perfect promise of the days to come. How marvelous—how *marvelous* it was! The little imperative, helpless third person, bringing to radiant youth and irresponsibility the terrors of danger and anguish, and the great final joy, to share together. That was life. Julie was living; and although

Margaret's own heart was not yet a wife's, and she could not yet find room for the love beyond that, still she was strangely, deeply stirred now by a longing for all the experiences that life held.

How she loved everything and everybody tonight—how she loved just being alive—just being Margaret Paget, lying here in the dark dreaming and thinking. There was no one in the world with whom she would change places tonight! Margaret found herself thinking of one woman of her acquaintance after another—and her own future, opening all color of rose before her, seemed to her the one enviable path through the world.

In just one day, she realized with vague wonder, her slowly formed theories had been set at naught, her whole philosophy turned upside down. Had these years of protest and rebellion done no more than lead her in a wide circle, past empty gain, and joyless mirth, and the dead sea fruit of riches and idleness, back to her mother's knees again? She had met brilliant women, rich women, courted women—but where among them was one whose face had ever shone as her mother's shone today? The overdressed, idle dowagers; the matrons, with their too-gay frocks, their too-full days, their too-rich food; the girls, all crudeness, artifice, all scheming openly for their own advantage—where among them all was happiness? Where among them was one whom Margaret had heard say—as she has heard her mother say so many, many times—"Children, this is a happy day,"—"Thank God for another lovely Sunday all together,"—"Isn't it lovely to get up and find the sun shining?"—"Isn't it good to come home hungry to such a nice dinner?"

And what a share of happiness her mother had given the world! How she had planned and worked for them all—Margaret let her arm fall across the sudden ache in her eyes as she thought of the Christmas mornings, and the stuffed stockings at the fireplace that proved every childish wish remembered, every little hidden hope guessed! Darling Mother—she hadn't had much money for those Christmas stockings, they must have been carefully planned, down to the last candy cane. And how her face would beam, as she sat at the breakfast table, enjoying her belated coffee, after the cold walk to church, and responding warmly to the onslaught of kisses and hugs that added fresh color to her cold, rosy cheeks! What a mother she was—Margaret remembered her making them all help her clear up the Christmas disorder of tissue paper and ribbons; then came the inevitable bed making, then tippets and overshoes, for a long walk with Dad. They would come back to find the dining-room warm, the long table set, the house deliciously fragrant from the immense turkey that their mother, a fresh apron over her holiday gown, was basting at the oven. Then came the feast, and then games until twilight, and more table-setting; and the baby, whoever he was, was tucked away upstairs before tea, and the evening ended with singing, gathered about Mother at the piano.

"How happy we all were!" Margaret said: "and how she worked for us!"

And suddenly theories and speculation ended, and she *knew*. She knew that faithful, self-forgetting service, and the love that spends itself over and over, only to be renewed again and again, are the secret of happiness. For another world, perhaps leisure and beauty and luxury—but in this one, "Who loses his life shall gain it." Margaret knew now that her mother was not only the truest, the finest, the most generous woman she had ever known, but the happiest as well.

She thought of other women like her mother; she suddenly saw what made their lives beautiful. She could understand now why Emily Porter, her old brave little associate of school-teaching days, was always bright, why Mary Page, plodding home from the long day at the library desk to her little cottage and crippled sister, at night, always made one feel the better and happier for meeting her.

Mrs. Carr-Boldt's days were crowded to the last instant, it was true; but what a farce it was, after all, Margaret said to herself in all honesty, to humor her in her little favorite belief that she was a busy woman! Milliner, manicure, butler, chef, club, card-table, tea-table—these and a thousand things like them filled her day, and they might all be swept away in an hour, and leave no one the worse. Suppose her own summons came; there would be a little flurry throughout the great establishment, legal matters to settle, notes of thanks to be written for flowers. Margaret could imagine Victoria and Harriet, awed but otherwise unaffected, home from school in midweek, and to be sent back before the next Monday. Their lives would go on unchanged, their mother had never buttered bread for them, never schemed for their boots and hats, never watched their work and play, and called them to her knees for praise and blame. Mr Carr-Boldt would have his club, his business, his yacht, his motor cars—he was well accustomed to living in cheerful independence of family claims.

But without Mother——! In a sick moment of revelation Margaret saw it. She saw them gathering in the horrible emptiness and silence of the house Mother had kept so warm and bright, she saw her father's stooped shoulders and trembling hands, she saw Julie and Beck, red-eyed, white-cheeked, in fresh black—she seemed to hear the low-toned voices that would break over and over again so cruelly into sobs. What could they do—who could take up the work she laid down—who would watch and plan and work for them all, now? Margaret thought of the empty place at the table, of the room that, after all these years, was no longer "Mother's room——"

Oh, no—no—no!—She began to cry bitterly in the dark. No, please God, they would hold her safe with them for many years. Mother should live to see some of the fruits of the long labor of love. She should know that with every fresh step in life, with every deepening experience, her children grew to love her better, turned to her more and more! There would be Christmases as sweet as the old ones, if not so gay; there would come a day—Margaret's whole being thrilled to the thought—when little

forms would run ahead of John and herself up the worn path, and when their children would be gathered in Mother's experienced arms! Did life hold a more exquisite moment, she wondered, than that in which she would hear her mother praise them!

All her old castles in the air seemed cheap and tinseled tonight, beside these tender dreams that had their roots in the real truths of life. Travel and position, gowns and motor cars, yachts and country houses, these things were to be bought in all their perfection by the highest bidder, and always would be. But love and character and service, home and the wonderful charge of little lives—the "pure religion breathing household laws" that guided and perfected the whole—these were not to be bought, they were only to be prayed for, worked for, bravely won.

"God has been very good to me," Margaret said to herself very seriously; and in her old childish fashion she made some new resolves. From now on, she thought, with a fervor that made it seem half accomplished, she would be a very different woman. If joy came, she would share it as far as she could; if sorrow, she would show her mother that her daughter was not all unworthy of her. Tomorrow, she thought, she would go and see Julie. Dear old Ju, whose heart was so full of the little Margaret! Margaret had a sudden tender memory of the days when Theodore and Duncan and Rob were all babies in turn. Her mother would gather the little daily supply of fresh clothes from bureau and chest every morning, and carry the little bath-tub into the sunny nursery window, and sit there with only a bobbing downy head and waving pink fingers visible from the great warm bundle of bath apron. . . . Ju would be doing that now.

And she had sometimes wished, or half formed the wish, that she and Bruce had been the only ones! Yes, came the sudden thought, but it wouldn't have been Bruce and Margaret, after all, it would have been Bruce and Charlie.

Good God! That was what women did, then, when they denied the right of life to the distant, unwanted, possible little person! Calmly, constantly, in all placid philosophy and self-justification, they kept from the world—not only the troublesome new baby, with his tears and his illnesses, his merciless exactions, his endless claim on mind and body and spirit—but perhaps the glowing beauty of a Rebecca, the buoyant indomitable spirit of a Ted, the sturdy charm of a small Robert, whose grip on life, whose energy and ambition were as strong as Margaret's own!

Margaret stirred uneasily, frowned in the dark. It seemed perfectly incredible, it seemed perfectly *impossible* that if Mother had had only the two—and how many thousands of women didn't have that!—she, Margaret, a pronounced and separate entity, traveled, ambitious, and to be the wife of one of the world's great men, might not have been lying here in the summer night, rich in love and youth and beauty and her dreams!

It was all puzzling, all too big for her to understand. But she could do

what Mother did, just take the nearest duty and fulfil it, and sleep well, and rise joyfully to fresh effort.

Margaret felt as if she would never sleep again. The summer night was cool, she was cramped and chilly; but still her thoughts raced on, and she could not shut her eyes. She turned and pressed her face resolutely into the pillow, and with a great sigh renounced the joys and sorrows, the lessons and the awakening that the long day had held.

A second later there was a gentle rustle at the door.

"Mark," a voice whispered. "Can't you sleep?"

Margaret locked her arms tight about her mother, as the older woman knelt beside her.

"Why, how cold you are, sweetheart!" her mother protested, tucking covers about her. "I *thought* I heard you sigh! I got up to lock the stairway door: Baby's gotten a trick of walking in his sleep when he's overtired. It's nearly one o'clock, Mark! What have you been doing?"

"Thinking." Margaret put her lips very close to her mother's ear. "Mother——" she stammered and stopped. Mrs Paget kissed her.

"Daddy and I thought so," she said simply; and further announcement was not needed. "My darling little girl!" she added tenderly; and then, after a silence, "He is very fine, Mark, so unaffected, so gentle and nice with the boys. I—I think I'm glad, Mark. I lose my girl, but there's no happiness like a happy marriage, dear."

"No, you won't lose me, Mother," Margaret said, clinging very close. "We hadn't much time to talk, but this much we did decide. You see, John—John goes to Germany for a year, next July. So we thought—in June or July, Mother, just as Julie's was! Just a little wedding like Ju's. You see, that's better than interrupting the term, or trying to settle down, when we'd have to move in July. And, Mother, I'm going to write Mrs Carr-Boldt—she can get a thousand girls to take my place, her niece is dying to do it!—and I'm going to take my old school here for the term. Mr Forbes spoke to me about it after church this morning; they want me back. I want this year at home; I want to see more of Bruce and Ju, and sort of stand by darling little Beck! But it's for you, most of all, Mother," said Margaret, with difficulty. "I've always loved you, Mother, but you don't know how wonderful I think you are!——" She broke off pitifully, "Ah, *Mother!*"

For her mother's arms had tightened convulsively about her, and the face against her own was wet.

"Are you talking?" said Rebecca, rearing herself up suddenly, with a web of bright hair falling over her shoulder. "You said your prayers on Mark last night," said she, reproachfully; "come over and say them on me tonight, Mother."

INTRODUCTION

THESE SIX SHORT STORIES *are chosen from a hundred others because they represent favorite types that I have used over and over again. One is the office-worker story, which was of course my own, and which keeps, even into a second generation, when the working world is so completely changed for women, certain characteristics of monotony, speculation, doubt, wonder, wishing and romance. Another is the Irish-American tale, the eternal story of New York and Brooklyn kitchens, and the simple, shrewd, wise, witty and holy women who people them. My mail, after one of these stories appears, is filled with letters from sons and daughters who knew "Ma Callaghan" or "Aunt Batty," and who are glad to laugh at the remembered superstitions, absurdities, old tales, prejudices and prophecies that were tributaries from old Ireland to the magnificent stream of lives lived in the newer world of America with courage, laughter, service, love and above all strong and abiding faith.*

To these I've added "Yesterday"; a story not in my usual vein, but a favorite of mine, and "Sinners" because it has so often been called my best. And finally I've included in this gathering of my imaginary clan of men and women an essay called "Beauty in Letters," a few pages in which I try to express what books have meant to me, and to acknowledge the debt we all owe to the makers of books. Our lives would be strangely blank and strangely changed without them. If there were but one place in the world where we could find them, we must all be pilgrims. If one man possessed them all, we must all be suitors. That there are always new ones and always good ones, and bookstores overflowing with old ones, remains a miracle of happiness in a world too often shadowed. Those fortunate ones among us who have early learned to love books, owe to Father and Mother and home influences an obligation never to be quite settled. For this "bequest of wings," whatever else betide, will always make our lives rich.

RISING WATER

From *Poor, Dear Margaret Kirby*

"If only my poor child had a sensible mother," said Mrs Tressady, calmly, "I suppose we would get Big Hong's 'carshen' for him, and that would do perfectly! But I will not have a Chinese man for Timothy's nurse! It seems all wrong, somehow."

"Big Hong hasn't got a female cousin, I suppose?" said Timothy's father; "a Chinese woman wouldn't be so bad."

"Oh, I think it would be as bad—nearly," Mrs Tressady returned with vivacity. "Anyway, this particular carshen is a man—'My carshen lun floot store'—that's who it is!"

"Will you kindly explain what 'My carshen lun floot store' means?" asked a young man who was lying in a hammock that he lazily moved now and then by means of a white-shod foot. This was Peter Porter, who, with his wife, completed the little group on the Tressadys' roomy, shady side porch.

"It means my cousin who runs a fruit store," supplied Mrs Porter—a big-boned, superb blonde who was in a deep chair sewing buttons on Timothy Tressady's new rompers. "Even I can see that—if I'm not a native of California."

"Yes, that's it," Mrs Tressady said absently. "Go back and read those Situations Wanted over again, Jerry," she commanded with a decisive snip of the elastic she was cunningly inserting into more new rompers for Timothy.

Jerry Tressady obediently sat up in his steamer chair and flattened a copy of the Emville *Mail* upon his knee.

The problem under discussion this morning was that of getting a nurse for Timothy Tressady, aged two years. Elma, the silent, undemonstrative Swedish woman who had been with the family since Timothy's birth, had started back to Stockholm two months ago, and since then at least a dozen unsatisfactory applicants for her position had taken their turn at the Rising Water Ranch.

Mrs Tressady, born and brought up in New York, sometimes sighed as she thought of her mother's capped and aproned maids; of Aunt Anna's maids; of her sister Lydia's maids. Sometimes in the hot summer when the sun hung directly over the California bungalow for seven hours every day, and the grass on the low, rolling hills all about was dry and slippery, when Joe Parlona forgot to drive out from Emville with ice and mail, and Elma complained that Timmy could not eat his luncheon on the porch because of buzzing "jellow yackets," Molly Tressady found herself thinking other treasonable thoughts—thoughts of packing, of final telegrams, of the Pullman sleeper, of Chicago in a blowing mist of

rain, of the Grand Central at twilight, with the lights of taxicabs beginning to move one by one into the current of Forty-second Street—and her heart grew sick with longings. And sometimes in winter, when rain splashed all day from the bungalow eaves, and Beaver Creek rose and flooded its banks and crept inch by inch toward the garden gate, and when from the late dawn to the early darkness not a soul came near the ranch—she would have sudden homesick memories of Fifth Avenue, three thousand miles away, with its motor cars and its furred women and its brilliant tea rooms. She would suddenly remember the opera house and the long line of carriages in the snow, and the boys calling the opera scores.

However, for such moods the quickest cure was a look at Jerry—strong, brown, vigorous Jerry—tramping the hills, writing his stories, dreaming over his piano, and sleeping deep and restfully under the great arch of the stars. Jerry had had a cold four years ago—"just a mean cold," had been the doctor's cheerful phrase; but what terror it struck to the hearts that loved Jerry! Molly's eyes, flashing to his mother's eyes, had said: "Like his father—like his aunt—like the little sister who died!" And for the first time Jerry's wife had found herself glad that little Jerry Junior—he who could barely walk, who had as yet no words—had gone away from them fearlessly into the great darkness a year before. He might have grown up to this, too.

So they came to California, and big Jerry's cold did not last very long in the dry heat of Beaver Creek Valley. He and Molly grew so strong and brown and happy that they never minded restrictions and inconveniences, loneliness and strangeness—and when a strong and brown and happy little Timothy joined the group, Molly renounced forever all serious thoughts of going home. California became home. Such friends as chance brought their way must be their only friends; such comfort as the dry little valley and the brown hills could hold must suffice them now. Molly exulted in sending her mother snapshots of Timmy picking roses in December, and in heading July letters: "By our open fire—for it's really cool today."

Indeed it was not all uncomfortable and unlovely. All the summer nights were fresh and cool and fragrant; there were spring days when all the valley seemed a ravishing compound of rain-cooled air and roses, of buttercups in the high, sunflecked grass under the apple trees, crossed and recrossed by the flashing blue and brown of mating jays and larks. It was not a long drive to the deep woods; and it was but six miles to Emville, where there was always the pleasant stir and bustle of a small country town; trains puffing in to disgorge a dozen traveling agents and their bags; the wire door at the post office banging and banging; the maid at the Old Original Imperial Commercial Hotel coming out on the long porch to ring a wildly clamorous dinner-bell. Molly grew to love Emville.

Then, two or three times a year, such old friends as the Porters, home-

ward bound after the Oriental trip, came their way, and there was delicious talk at the ranch of old days, of the new theaters, and the new hotels, and the new fashions. The Tressadys stopped playing double Canfield and polished up their bridge game; and Big Hong, beaming in his snowy white, served meals that were a joy to his heart. Hong was a marvelous cook; Hong cared beautifully for all his domain; and Little Hong took care of the horses, puttered in the garden, swept, and washed windows. But they needed more help, for there were times when Molly was busy or headachy or proof-reading for Jerry or riding with him. Some one must be responsible every second of the day and night for Timmy. And where to get that some one?

"Aren't they terrors!" said Mrs Porter in reference to the nurse-maids that would not come to the ranch on any terms. "What do they expect anyway?"

"Oh, they get lonesome," Molly said in discouragement, "and of course it is lonely! But I should think some middle-aged woman or some widow with a child even——"

"Molly always returns to that possible widow!" said her husband. "I thing we might try two!"

"I would never think of that!" said the mistress of the ranch family. "Four servants always underfoot!"

"Did you ever think of trying a regular trained nurse, Molly?" Peter Porter asked.

"But then you have them at the table, Peter—and always in the drawing-room evenings. And no matter how nice they are——"

"That's the worst of that!" agreed Peter.

Jerry Tressady threw the *Mail* on the floor and sat up.

"Who's this coming up now, Molly?" he asked.

He had lowered his voice, because the white-clad young woman who was coming composedly up the path between the sunflowers and the overloaded rosebushes was already within hearing distance. She was a heavy, well-developed young person upon closer view, with light-lashed eyes of a guileless, childlike blue, rosy cheeks, and a mass of bright, shining hair, protected now only by a parasol. Through the embroidery insertion of her fresh, stiff dress she showed glimpses of a snowy bosom, and under her crisp skirt a ruffle of white petticoat and white-shod feet were visible. She was panting from her walk and wiped her glowing face with her handkerchief before she spoke.

"Howdy-do, folks?" said the newcomer, easily, dropping upon the steps and fanning herself with the limp handkerchief. "I don't wonder you keep a motor car; it's something fierce walking down here! I could of waited," she went on thoughtfully, "and had my brother brought me down in the machine, but I hadn't no idea it was so far. I saw your ad in the paper," she went on, addressing Mrs Tressady directly, with a sort of trusting simplicity that was rather pretty, "and I thought you might like me for your girl."

"Well,—" began Molly, entirely at a loss, for until this second no suspicion of the young woman's errand had occurred to her. She dared not look at husband or guests; she fixed her eyes seriously upon the would-be nurse.

"Of course I wouldn't work for everybody," said the newcomer hastily and proudly. "I never worked before and mamma thinks I'm crazy to work now, but I don't think that taking care of a child is anything to be ashamed of!" The blue eyes flashed dramatically—she evidently enjoyed this speech. "And what's more, I don't expect any one of my friends to shun me or treat me any different because I'm a servant—that is, so long as I act like a lady," she finished in a lower tone. A sound from the hammock warned Mrs Tressady; and suggesting in a somewhat unsteady voice that they talk the matter over indoors, she led the new maid out of sight.

For some twenty minutes the trio on the porch heard the steady rise and fall of voices indoors, then Molly appeared and asked her husband in a rather dissatisfied voice what he thought.

"Why, it's what you think, dear. How's she seem?"

"She's competent enough—seems to know all about children, and I think she'd be strong and willing. She's clean as a pink, too. And she'd come for thirty and would be perfectly contented, because she lives right near here—that house just before you come to Emville which says Chickens and Carpentering Done Here—don't you know? She has a widowed sister who would come and stay with her at night when we're away." Mrs Tressady summed it up slowly.

"Why not try her then, dear? By the way, what's her name?"

"Darling—Belle Darling."

"Tell her I'm English," said Mr Porter, rapturously, "and that over there we call servants——"

"No, but Jerry,"—Mrs Tressady was serious,—"would you? She's so utterly untrained. That's the one thing against her. She hasn't the faintest idea of the way a servant should act. She told me she just loved the way I wore my hair, and she said she wanted me to meet her friend. Then she asked me, 'Who'd you name him Timothy for?'"

"Oh, you'd tame her fast enough. Just begin by snubbing her every chance you get——"

"I see it!" laughed Mrs Porter, for Mrs Tressady was a woman full of theories about the sisterhood of woman, about equality, about a fair chance for every one—and had never been known to hurt any one's feelings in the entire course of her life.

Just here Belle stepped through one of the drawing-room French windows, with dewy, delicious Timothy, in faded pale-blue sleeping-wear, in her arms.

"This darling little feller was crying," said Belle, "and I guess he wants some din-din—don't you, lover? Shall I step out and tell one of those Chinese boys to get it? Listen! From now on I'll have mama save

all the banty eggs for you, Timmy, and some day I'll take you down there and show you the rabbits, darling. Would you like that?"

Molly glanced helplessly at her husband.

"How soon could you come, Belle?" asked Jerry, and that settled it. He had interpreted his wife's look and assumed the responsibility. Molly found herself glad.

Belle came two days later, with every evidence of content. It soon became evident that she had adopted the family and considered herself adopted in turn. Her buoyant voice seemed to leap out of every opened door. She rose above her duties and floated along on a constant stream of joyous talk.

"We're going to have fried chicken and strawberries—my favorite dinner!" said Belle when Molly was showing her just how she liked the table set. After dinner, cheerfully polishing glasses, she suddenly burst into song as she stood at the open pantry window, some ten feet from the side porch. The words floated out:

"And the band was bravely playing
The song of the cross and crown—
Nearer, my God, to Thee—
As the ship——"

Mrs Tressady sat up, a stirring shadow among the shadows of the porch.

"I must ask her not to do that," she announced quietly, and disappeared.

"And I spoke to her about joining in the conversation at dinner," she said, returning. "She took it very nicely."

Belle's youthful spirits were too high to succumb to one check, however. Five minutes later she burst forth again:

"Ring, ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling, on your telephone—
And ring me up tonight——"

"Soft pedal, Belle!" Jerry called.

Belle laughed.

"Sure!" she called back. "I forgot."

Presently the bright blot of light that fell from the pantry window on the little willow trees vanished silently, and they could hear Belle's voice in the kitchen.

"Good-natured," said Molly.

"Strong," Mrs Porter said.

"And pretty as a peach!" said Peter Porter.

"Oh, she'll do!" Jerry Tressady said contentedly.

She was good-natured, strong, and pretty indeed, and she did a great deal. Timmy's little garments fluttered on the clothes-line before breakfast; Timmy's room was always in order; Timmy was always dainty and clean. Belle adored him and the baby returned her affection. They

murmured together for hours down on the river bank or on the shady porch. Belle always seemed cheerful.

Nor could it be said that Belle did not know her place. She reveled in her title. "This is Mrs Tressady's maid," Belle would say mincingly at the telephone, "and she does not allow her servants to make engagements for her." "My friends want me to enter my name for a prize for the most popular girl in the Emville bazaar, Mrs Tressady; but I thought I would ask your permission first."

But there was a sort of breezy familiarity about her very difficult to check. On her second day at the ranch she suddenly came behind Jerry Tressady seated on the piano bench and slipped a sheet of music before him.

"Won't you just run over that last chorus for me, Mr Tress'dy?" asked Belle. "I have to sing that at a party Thursday night and I can't seem to get it."

No maid between Washington Square and the Bronx Zoo would have asked this favor. Yes, but Rising Water Ranch was not within those limits, nor within several thousand miles of them; so Jerry played the last chorus firmly, swiftly, without comment, and Belle gratefully withdrew. The Porters, unseen witnesses of this scene, on the porch, thought this very amusing; but only a day later Mrs Porter herself was discovered in the act of buttoning the long line of buttons that went down the back of one of Belle's immaculate white gowns.

"Well, what could I do? She suddenly backed up before me," Mrs Porter said in self-defense. "Could I tell her to let Hong button her?"

After dinner on the same day Peter Porter cleared a space before him on the table and proceeded to a demonstration involving a fork, a wedding ring, and a piece of string. While the quartet, laughing, were absorbed in the mysterious swinging of the suspended ring, Belle, putting away her clean silver, suddenly joined the group.

"I know a better one than that," said she, putting a glass of water before Mrs Tressady. "Here—take your ring again. Now wait—I'll pull out one of your hairs for you. Now swing it over the water inside the glass. It'll tell your age."

Entirely absorbed in the experiment, her fresh young face close to theirs, her arms crossed as she knelt by the table, she had eyes only for the ring.

"We won't keep you from your dishes, Belle," said Molly.

"Oh, I'm all through," said Belle, cheerfully. "There!" For the ring was beginning to strike the glass with delicate, even strokes—thirty.

"Now do it again," cried Belle, delightedly, "and it'll tell your married life!"

Again the ring struck the glass—eight.

"Well, that's very marvelous," said Molly, in genuine surprise; but when Belle had gone back to her pantry, Mrs Tressady rose, with a little sigh, and followed her.

"Call her down?" asked Jerry, an hour later.

"Well, no," the lady admitted, smiling. "No! She was putting away Timmy's bibs, and she told me that he had seemed a little upset tonight, she thought; so she gave him just barley gruel and the white of an egg for supper, and some rhubarb water before he went to bed. And what could I say? But I will, though!"

During the following week Mrs Tressady told Belle she must not rush into a room shouting news—she must enter quietly and wait for an opportunity to speak; Mrs Tressady asked her to leave the house by the side porch and quietly when going out in the evening to drive with her young man; Mrs Tressady asked her not to deliver the mail with the announcement: "Three from New York, an ad from Emville, and one with a five-cent stamp on it"; she asked her not to shout out from the drive, "White skirt show?" She said Belle must not ask, "What's he doing?" when discovering Mr Tressady deep in a chess problem; Belle must not drop into a chair when bringing Timmy out to the porch after his afternoon outing; she must not be heard exclaiming, "Yankee Doodle!" and "What do you know about that!" when her broom dislodged a spider or her hair caught on the rose bushes.

To all of these requests Belle answered, "Sure!" with great penitence and amiability.

"Sure, Mis' Tress'dy—Say, listen! I can match that insertion I spilled ink on—in Emville. Isn't that the limit? I can fix it so it'll never show in the world!"

"I wouldn't stand that girl for—one—minute," said Mrs Porter to her husband; but this was some weeks later when the Porters were in a comfortable Pullman, rushing toward New York.

"I think Molly's afraid of flying in the face of Providence and discharging her," said Peter Porter—"but praying every day that she'll go."

This was almost the truth. Belle's loyalty, affection, good nature, and willingness were beyond price, but Belle's noisiness, her slang, and her utter lack of training were a sore trial. When November came, with rains that kept the little household at Rising Water prisoners indoors, Mrs Tressady began to think she could not stand Belle much longer.

"My goodness!" Belle would say loudly when sent for to bring a filled lamp. "Is that other lamp burned out already? Say, listen! I'll give you the hall lamp while I fill it." "You oughtn't to touch pie just after one of your headaches!" she would remind her employer in a respectful aside at dinner. And sometimes when Molly and her husband were busy in the study a constant stream of conversation would reach them from the nursery where Belle was dressing Timothy:

"Now where's the boy that's going to let Belle wash his face? Oh, my, what a good boy! Now, just a minny—minny—minny—that's all. Now give Belle a sweet, clean kiss—yes, but give Belle a sweet, clean kiss—give Belle a kiss—oh, Timmy, do you want Belle to cry? Well, then, give her a kiss—give Belle a sweet kiss——"

When Molly was bathing the boy Belle would come and take a comfortable chair near by, ready to spring for powder or pins, but otherwise studying her fingernails or watching the bath with genial interest. Molly found herself actually lacking in the strength of mind to exact that Belle stand silently near on these occasions, and so listened to a great many of Belle's confidences. Belle at home; Belle in the high school; Belle trying a position in Robbins's candy store and not liking it because she was not used to freshness—all these Belles became familiar to Molly. Gruesome sicknesses, famous local crimes, gossip, weddings—Belle touched upon them all; and Molly was ashamed to find it all interesting, in spite of herself. One day Belle told Molly of Joe Rogers, and Joe figured daily in the narratives thereafter—Joe, who drove a carriage, a motor, or a hay wagon, as the occasion required, for his uncle who owned a livery stable, but whose ambition was to buy out old Scanlon, the local undertaker, and to marry Belle.

"Joe knows more about embalming than even Owens of Napa does," confided Belle. "He's got every plat in the cemetery memorized—and, his uncle having carriages and horses, it would work real well; but Scanlon wants three thousand for the business and goodwill."

"I wish he had it and you this minute!" Molly would think. But when she opened Timmy's bureau drawers, to find little suits and coats and socks in snowy, exquisite order; when Timmy, trim, sweet, and freshly clad, appeared for breakfast every morning, his fat hand in Belle's, and "Dea' Booey"—as he called her—figuring prominently in his limited vocabulary, Molly weakened again.

"Is he mad this morning?" Belle would ask in a whisper before Jerry appeared. "Say, listen! You just let him think I broke the decanter!" she suggested one day in loyal protection of Molly. "Why, I think the world and all of Mr Tressady!" she assured Molly, when reproved for speaking of him in this way. "Wasn't it the luckiest thing in the world—my coming up that day?" she would demand joyously over and over. Her adoption of and by the family of Tressady was—to her, at least—complete.

In January Uncle George Tressady's estate was finally distributed, and this meant great financial ease at Rising Water. Belle, Molly said, was really getting worse and worse as she became more and more at home; and the time had come to get a nice trained nurse—some one who could keep a professional eye on Timmy, be a companion to Molly, and who would be quiet and refined, and gentle in her speech.

"And not a hint to Belle, Jerry," Molly warned him, "until we see how it is going to work. She'll see presently that we don't need both."

When Miss Marshall, cool, silent, drab of hair and eye, arrived at the ranch, Belle was instantly suspicious.

"What's she here for? Who's sick?" demanded Belle, coming into Mrs Tressady's room and closing the door behind her, her eyes bright and hard.

Molly explained diplomatically. Belle must be very polite to the newcomer; it was just an experiment—"This would be a good chance to hint that I'm not going to keep both," thought Molly, as Belle listened.

Belle disarmed her completely, however, by coming over to her with a suddenly bright face and asking in an awed voice:

"Is it another baby? Oh, you don't know how glad I'd be! The darling, darling little thing!"

Molly felt the tears come into her eyes—a certain warmth creep about her heart.

"No," she said smiling; "but I'm glad you will love it if it ever comes!" This was, of course, exactly what she did not mean to say.

"If we got Miss Marshall because of Uncle George's money," said Belle, huffily, departing, "I wish he hadn't died! There isn't a thing in this world for her to do."

Miss Marshall took kindly to idleness—talking a good deal of previous cases, playing solitaire, and talking freely to Molly of various internes and patients who admired her. She marked herself at once as unused to children by calling Timothy "little man," and, except for a vague, friendly scrutiny of his tray three times a day, did nothing at all—even leaving the care of her room to Belle.

After a week or two, Miss Marshall went away, to Belle's great satisfaction, and Miss Clapp came. Miss Clapp was forty, and strong and serious; she did not embroider or confide in Molly; she sat silent at meals, chewing firmly, her eyes on her plate. "What would you like me to do now?" she would ask Molly, gravely, at intervals.

Molly, with Timothy asleep and Belle sweeping, could only murmur: "Why, just now,—let me see,—perhaps you'd like to write letters—or just read——"

"And are you going to take little Timothy with you when he wakes up?"

Molly would evade the uncompromising eyes.

"Why, I think so. The sun's out now. You must come, too."

Miss Clapp, coming, too, cast a damper on the drive; and she persisted in talking about the places where she was really needed.

"Imagine a ward with forty little suffering children in it, Mrs Tressady! That's real work—that's a real privilege!"

After a week or two Miss Clapp went joyously back to her real work with a generous check for her children's ward in her pocket. She kissed Timothy good-by with the first tenderness she had shown.

"Didn't she make you feel like an ant in an anthill?" asked Belle, cheerfully watching the departing carriage. "She really didn't take no interest in Timothy because there wasn't a hundred of him!"

There was a peaceful interval after this, while Molly diligently advertised for "A competent nurse. One child only. Good salary. Small family in country."

No nurse, competent or incompetent, replied. Then came the January

morning when Belle casually remarked: "Stupid! You never wound it!" to the master of the house, who was attempting to start a stopped clock. This was too much! Mrs Tressady immediately wrote the letter that engaged Miss Carter, a highly qualified and high-priced nursery governess who had been recommended by a friend.

Miss Carter, a rosy, strong, pleasant girl, appeared two days later in a driving rain and immediately "took hold." She was talkative, assured in manner, neat in appearance, entirely competent. She drove poor Belle to frenzy with her supervision of Timothy's trays, baths and clothes, amusements and sleeping arrangements. Timmy liked her, which was point one in her favor. Point two was that she liked to have her meals alone, liked to disappear with a book, could amuse herself for hours in her own room.

The Tressadys, in the privacy of their own room, began to say to each other: "I like her—she'll do!"

"She's very complacent," Molly would say with a sigh.

"But it's nothing to the way Belle effervesces all over the place!"

"Oh, I suppose she is simply trying to make a good impression—that's all." And Mrs Tressady began to cast about in her mind for just the words in which to tell Belle that—really—four servants were not needed at the ranch. Belle was so sulky in these days and so rude to the newcomer that Molly knew she would have no trouble in finding good reason for the dismissal.

"Are we going to keep her?" Belle asked scornfully one morning—to which her mistress answered sharply:

"Belle, kindly do not shout so when you come into my room. Do you see that I am writing?"

"Gee whiz!" said Belle, sorrowfully, as she went out, and she visibly drooped all day.

It was decided that as soon as the Tressadys' San Francisco visit was over, Belle should go. They were going down to the city for a week in early March—for some gowns for Molly, some dinners, some opera, and one of the talks with Jerry's doctor that were becoming so delightfully unnecessary.

They left the ranch in a steady, gloomy downpour. Molly did her packing between discouraged trips to the window, and deluged Belle and Miss Carter with apprehensive advice that was not at all like her usual trusting outlook.

"Don't fail to telephone me instantly at the hotel if anything—but, of course, nothing will," said Molly. "Anyway you know the doctor's number, Belle, and about a hot-water bag for him if his feet are cold, and oil the instant he shows the least sign of fever——"

"Cert'n'y!" said Belle, reassuringly.

"This is Monday," said Molly. "We'll be back Sunday night. Have Little Hong meet us at the Junction. And if it's clear, bring Timmy."

"Cert'n'y!" said Belle.

"I hate to go in all this rain!" Molly said an hour or two later from the depths of the motor car.

Miss Carter was holding Timmy firmly on the sheltered porch railing. Belle stood on an upper step in the rain. Big Hong beamed from the shadowy doorway. At the last instant Belle suddenly caught Timmy in her arms and ran down the wet path.

"Give muddy a reel good kiss for good-by!" commanded Belle, and Molly hungrily claimed not one, but a score.

"Good-by, my heart's heart!" she said. "Thank you, Belle." As the carriage whirled away she sighed. "Was there ever such a good-hearted, impossible creature!"

Back into the house went Belle and Timmy, Miss Carter and Big Hong. Back came Little Hong with the car. Silence held the ranch; the waning winter light fell on Timmy, busy with blocks; on Belle darning; on Miss Carter reading a light novel. The fire blazed, sank to quivering blue, leaped with a sucking noise about a fresh log, and sank again. At four the lamps were lighted, the two women fussed amicably together over Timothy's supper. Later, when he was asleep, Miss Carter, who had no particular fancy for the shadows that lurked in the corners of the big room and the howling wind on the roof, said sociably: "Shall we have our dinner on two little tables right here before the fire, Belle?" And still later, after an evening of desultory reading and talking, she suggested that they leave their bedroom doors open. Belle agreed. If Miss Carter was young, Belle was younger still.

The days went by. Hong served them delicious meals. Timmy was angelic. They unearthed halma, puzzles, fortune-telling cards. The rain fell steadily; the eaves dripped; the paths were sheets of water.

"It certainly gets on your nerves—doesn't it?" said Miss Carter, when the darkness came on Thursday night. Belle, from the hall, came and stood beside her at the fireplace.

"Our 'phone is cut off," said she, uneasily. "The water must of cut down a pole somewheres. Let's look at the river."

Suddenly horror seemed to seize upon them both. They could not cross the floor fast enough and plunge fast enough into the night. It was dark out on the porch, and for a moment or two they could see nothing but the swimming blackness, and hear nothing but the gurgle and drip of the rain-water from eaves and roof. The rain had stopped, or almost stopped. A shining fog seemed to lie flat—high and level over the river-bed.

Suddenly, as they stared, this fog seemed to solidify before their eyes, seemed curiously to step into the foreground and show itself for what it was. They saw it was no longer fog, but water—a level spread of dark, silent water. The Beaver Creek had flooded its banks and was noiselessly, pitilessly creeping over the world.

"It's the river!" Belle whispered. "Gee whiz, isn't she high!"

"What is it?" gasped Miss Carter, from whose face every vestige of color had fled.

"Why, it's the river!" Belle answered, slowly, uneasily. She held out her hand. "Thank God, the rain's stopped!" she said under her breath. Then, so suddenly that Miss Carter jumped nervously, she shouted: "Hong!"

Big Hong came out, and Little Hong. All four stood staring at the motionless water, which was like some great, menacing presence in the dark—some devil-fish of a thousand arms, content to bide his time.

The bungalow stood on a little rise of ground in a curve of the river. On three sides of it, at all seasons, were the sluggish currents of Beaver Creek, and now the waters met on the fourth side. The garden path that led to the Emville road ran steeply now into this pool, and the road, sloping upward almost imperceptibly, emerged from the water perhaps two hundred feet beyond.

"Him how deep?" asked Hong.

"Well, those hollyhocks at the gate are taller than I am," Belle said, "and you can't see them at all. I'll bet it's ten feet deep most of the way."

She had grown very white, and seemed to speak with difficulty. Miss Carter went into the house, with the dazed look of a woman in a dream, and knelt at the piano bench.

"Oh, my God—my God—my God!" she said in a low, hoarse tone, her fingers pressed tightly over her eyes.

"Don't be so scared!" said Belle, hardily, though the sight of the other woman's terror had made her feel cold and sick at her stomach. "There's lots of things we can do——"

"There's an attic——"

"Ye-es," Belle hesitated. "But I wouldn't go up there," she said. "It's just an unfloored place under the roof—no way out!"

"No—no—no—not there, then!" Miss Carter said heavily, paler than before. "But what can we do?"

"Why, this water is backing up," Belle said slowly. "It's not coming downstream, so any minute whatever's holding it back may burst and the whole thing go at once—or if it stops raining, it won't go any higher."

"Well, we must get away as fast as we can while there is time," said Miss Carter, trembling, but more composed. "We could swim that distance—I swim a little. Then, if we can't walk into Emville, we'll have to spend the night on the hills. We could reach the hills, I should think." Her voice broke. "Oh—this is terrible!" she broke out frantically—and she began to walk the floor.

"Hong, could we get the baby across?" asked Belle.

"Oh, the child—of course!" said Miss Carter, under her breath. Hong shook his head.

"Man come bimeby boat," he suggested. "Me no swim—Little Hong no swim."

"You can't swim!" cried Miss Carter, despairingly, and covered her face with her hands.

Little Hong now came in to make some earnest suggestion in Chinese. His uncle, approving it, announced that they two, unable to swim, would, nevertheless, essay to cross the water with the aid of a floating kitchen bench, and that they would fly for help. They immediately carried the bench out into the night.

The two women followed; a hideous need of haste seemed to possess them all. The rain was falling heavily again.

"It's higher," said Miss Carter, in a dead tone. Belle eyed the water nervously.

"You couldn't push Timmy acrost on that bench?" she ventured.

It became immediately evident, however, that the men would be extremely fortunate in getting themselves across. The two dark, sleek heads made slow progress on the gloomy water. The bench tipped, turned slowly, righted itself, and tipped again. Soon they worked their slow way out of sight.

Then came silence—silence!

"She's rising!" said Belle.

Miss Carter went blindly into the house. She was ashen and seemed to be choking. She sat down.

"They'll be back in no time," said she, in a sick voice.

"Sure!" said Belle, moistening her lips.

There was a long silence. Rain drummed on the roof.

"Do you swim, Belle?" Miss Carter asked after a restless march about the room.

"Some—I couldn't swim with the baby——"

Miss Carter was not listening. She leaned her head against the mantelpiece. Suddenly she began to walk again, her eyes wild, her breath uneven.

"Well, there must be something we can do, Belle!"

"I've been trying to think," said Belle, slowly. "A bread board wouldn't float, you know, even if the baby would sit on it. We've not got a barrel—and a box——"

"There must be boxes!" cried the other woman.

"Yes; but the least bit of a tip would half fill a box with water. No——" Belle shook her head. "I'm not a good enough swimmer."

Another short silence.

"Belle, does this river rise every winter?"

"Why, yes, I suppose it does. I know one year Emville was flooded and the shops moved upstairs. There was a family named Wescott living up near here then——" Belle did not pursue the history of the Westcott family, and Miss Carter knew why.

"Oh, I think it is criminal for people to build in a place like this!"

Miss Carter burst out passionately. "They're safe enough—oh, certainly!" she went on with bitter emphasis. "But they leave us——"

"It shows how little you know us, thinking we'd run any risk with Timmy——" Belle said stiffly; but she interrupted herself to say sharply: "Here's the water!"

She went to the door and opened it. The still waters of Beaver Creek were lapping the porch steps.

Miss Carter made an inarticulate exclamation and went into her room. Belle, following her to her door, saw her tear off her shoes and stockings, and change her gown for some brief, dark garment.

"It's every one for himself now!" said Miss Carter, feverishly. "This is no time for sentiment. If they don't care enough for their child to—This is my gym suit—I'm thankful I brought it. Don't be utterly mad, Belle! If the water isn't coming, Timmy'll be all right. If it is, I don't see why we should be so utterly crazy as not to try to save ourselves. We can easily swim it, and then we can get help—— You've got a bathing suit—go put it on. My God, Belle, it's not as if we could do anything by staying. If we could, I'd——"

Belle turned away. When Miss Carter followed her, she found her in Mrs Tressady's bedroom, looking down at the sleeping Timmy. Timmy had taken to bed with him a box of talcum powder wrapped in a towel, as a "doddy." One fat, firm little hand still held the meaningless toy. He was breathing heavily, evenly—his little forehead moist, his hair clinging in tendrils about his face.

"No—of course we can't leave him!" said Miss Carter, heavily, as the women went back to the living-room. She went frantically from window to window. "It's stopped raining!" she announced.

"We'll laugh at this tomorrow," said Belle.

They went to the door. A shallow sheet of water, entering, crept in a great circle about their very feet.

"Oh, no—it's not to be expected; it's too much!" Miss Carter cried. Without an instant's hesitation she crossed the porch and splashed down the invisible steps.

"I take as great a chance in going as you do in staying," she said, with chattering teeth. "If—if it comes any higher, you'll swim for it—won't you, Belle?"

"Oh, I'd try it with him as a last chance," Belle answered sturdily. She held a lamp so that its light fell across the water. "That's right. Keep headed that way!" she said.

"I'm all right!" Miss Carter's small head was bravely cleaving the smooth dark water. "I'll run all the way and bring back help in no time," she called back.

When the lamp no longer illumined her, Belle went into the house. The door would not shut, but the water was not visibly higher. She went in to Timmy's crib, knelt down beside him, and put her arms about his warm little body.

Meanwhile Timmy's father and mother, at the hotel, were far from happy. They stopped for a paper on their way to the opera on Thursday night; and on their return, finding no later edition procurable, telephoned one of the newspapers to ask whether there was anything in the reports that the rivers were rising up round Emville. On Friday morning Jerry, awakening, perceived his wife half-hidden in the great, rose-colored window draperies, barefoot, still in her nightgown, and reading a paper.

"Jerry," said she, very quietly, "can we go home today? I'm worried. Some of the Napa track has been washed away and they say the water's being pushed back. Can we get the nine o'clock train?"

"But, darling, it must be eight now."

"I know it."

"Why not telephone to Belle, dear, and have them all come into Emville if you like."

"Oh, Jerry—of course! I never thought of it." She flew to the telephone on the wall. "The operator says she can't get them—they're so stupid!" she presently announced.

Jerry took the instrument away from her and the little lady contentedly began her dressing. When she came out of the dressing-room a few moments later, her husband was flinging things into his suit-case.

"Get Belle, Jerry?"

"Nope." He spoke cheerfully, but did not meet her eyes. "Nope. They can't get 'em. Lines seem to be down. I guess we'll take the nine."

"Jerry,"—Molly Tressady came over to him quietly,—"what did they tell you?"

"Now, nothing at all——" Jerry began. At his tone terror sprang to Molly's heart and sank its cruel claws there. There was no special news from Rising Water he explained soothingly; but, seeing that she was nervous, and the nine was a through train, and so on—and on——

"Timmy—Timmy—Timmy!" screamed Molly's heart. She could not see; she could not think or hear, or taste her breakfast. Her little boy—her little, helpless, sturdy, confident baby, who had never been frightened, never alone—never anything but warm and safe and doubly, trebly guarded——

They were crossing a sickening confusion that was the hotel lobby. They were moving in a taxicab through bright, hideous streets. The next thing she knew, Jerry was seating her in a parlor car.

"Yes, I know, dear—Of course—Surely!" she said pleasantly and mechanically when he seemed to expect an answer.—She thought of how he would have come to meet her; of how the little voice always rang out: "Dere's my muddy!"

"Raining again!" said Jerry. "It stopped this morning at two. Oh, yes, really it did. We're almost there now. Hello! Here's the boy with the morning papers. See, dear, here's the headline: Rain stops at One-fifty——"

But Molly had seen another headline—a big headline that read: "Loss

of Life at Rising Water! Governess of Jerome Tressady's Family Swims One Mile to Safety!"—and she had fainted away.

She was very brave, very reasonable, when consciousness came back, but there could be no more pretense. She sat in the demoralized little parlor of the Emville Hotel—waiting for news—very white, very composed, a terrible look in her eyes. Jerry came and went constantly; other people constantly came and went. The flood was falling fast now and barges were being towed down the treacherous waters of Beaver Creek; refugees—and women and children whom the mere sight of safety and dry land made hysterical again—were being gathered up. Emville matrons, just over their hours of terror, were murmuring about gowns, about beds, about food: "Lots of room—well, thank God for that—you're all safe, anyway!" "Yes, indeed; that's the only thing that counts!" "Well, bless his heart, we'll tell him some day that when he was a baby——" Molly caught scraps of their talk, their shaken laughter, their tears; but there was no news of Belle—of Timmy——

"Belle is a splendid, strong country girl, you know, dear," Jerry said. "Belle would be equal to any emergency!"

"Of course," Molly heard herself say.

Jerry presently came in from one of his trips to draw a chair close to his wife's and tell her that he had seen Miss Carter.

"Or, at least, I've seen her mother," said Jerry, laying a restraining hand upon Molly, who sat bolt upright, her breast heaving painfully—"for she herself is feverish and hysterical, dear. It seems that she left—— Now, my darling, you must be quiet."

"I'm all right, Jerry. Go on! Go on!"

"She says that Hong and Little Hong managed to get away early in the evening for help. She didn't leave until about midnight, and Belle and the boy were all right then——"

"Oh, my God!" cried poor Molly.

"Molly, dear, you make it harder."

"Yes, I know." Her penitent hot hand touched his own. "I know, dear—I'm sorry."

"That's all, dear. The water wasn't very high then. Belle wouldn't leave Timmy——" Jerry Tressady jumped suddenly to his feet and went to stare out the window with unseeing eyes. "Miss Carter didn't get into town here until after daylight," he resumed, "and the mother, poor soul, is wild with fright over her; but she's all right. Now, Molly, there's a barge going up as far as Rising Water at four. They say the bungalow is still cut off, probably, but they'll take us as near as they can. I'm going, and this Rogers—Belle's friend—will go, too."

"What do you think, Jerry?" she besought him, agonized.

"My darling, I don't know what to think."

"Were—were many lives lost, Jerry?"

"A few, dear."

"Jerry,"—Molly's burning eyes searched his,—"I'm sane now. I'm

not going to faint again; but—but—after little Jerry—I couldn't bear it and live!"

"God sent us strength for that, Molly."

"Yes, I know!" she said, and burst into bitter tears.

It had been arranged that Molly should wait at the hotel for the return of the barge; but Jerry was not very much surprised, upon going on board, to find her sitting, a shadowy ghost of herself, in the shelter of the boxed supplies that might be needed. He did not protest, but sat beside her; and Belle's friend, a serious, muscular young man, took his place at her other side.

The puffing little George Dickey started on her merciful journey only after some agonizing delays; but Molly did not comment upon them once, nor did any one of the trio speak throughout the terrible journey. The storm was gone now, and pale, uncertain sunlight was falling over the altered landscape—over the yellow, sullen current of the river; over the drowned hills and partly submerged farms. A broom drifted by; a child's perambulator; a porch chair. Now and then there was frantic signaling from some little, sober group of refugees, huddled together on a water-stained porch or traveling slowly down the heavy roads in a spattered surrey.

"This is as near as we can go," Jerry said presently. The three were rowed across shallow water and found themselves slowly following on foot the partly obliterated road they knew so well. A turn of the road brought the bungalow into view.

There the little house stood, again high above the flood, though the garden was a drenched waste, and a shallow sheet of water still lay across the pathway. The sinking sun struck dazzling lights from all the windows; no living thing was in sight. A terrible stillness held the place!

To the gate they went and across the pool. Then Jerry laid a restraining hand on his wife's arm.

"Yes'm. You'd 'a' better wait here," said young Rogers, speaking for the first time. "Belle's got away with the baby! We'll just take a look."

They were not ten feet from the house, now—hesitating, sick with dread. Suddenly on the still air there was borne a sound that stopped them where they stood. It was a voice—Belle's voice—tired and somewhat low, but unmistakably Belle's:

"Then I'll go home, my crown to wear;
For there's a crown for me——"

"Belle!" screamed Molly. Somehow she had mounted the steps, crossed the porch, and was at the kitchen door.

Belle and Timothy were in the kitchen—Timothy's little bib tied about his neck, Timothy's little person securely strapped in his high chair, and Timothy's blue bowl, full of some miraculously preserved cereal, before him. Belle was seated—her arms resting heavily and wearily upon his tray, her dress stained to the armpits, her face colorless and marked by

dark lines. She turned and sprang up at the sound of voices and feet, and had only time for a weak smile before she fell quite senseless to the floor. Timmy waved a welcoming spoon, and shouted lustily: "Dere's my muddy!"

Presently Belle was resting her head upon Joe's big shoulder, and laughing and crying over the horrors of the night. Timothy was in his mother's arms, but Molly had a hand free for Belle's hand and did not let it go through all the hour that followed. Her arms might tighten about the delicious little form, her lips brush the tumbled little head—but her eyes were all for Belle.

"It wasn't so fierce," said Belle. "The water went highest at one; and we went to the porch and thought we'd have to swim for it—didn't we, Timmy? But it stayed still a long time, and it wasn't raining, and I came in and set Timmy on the mantel—my arms were so tired. It's real lucky we have a mantel, isn't it?"

"You stood, and held Tim on the mantel: that was it?" asked Jerry.

"Sure—while we was waiting," said Belle. "I wouldn't have minded anything, but the waiting was fierce. Timmy was an angel! He set there and I held him—I don't know—a long time. Then I seen that the water was going down again; I could tell by the bookcase, and I begun to cry. Timmy kept kissing me—didn't you, lover?" She laughed, with trembling lips and tearful eyes. "We'll have a fine time cleaning this house," she broke off, trying to steady her voice; "it's simply awful—everything's ruined!"

"We'll clean it up for your marriage, Belle," said Jerry, cheerfully, clearing his throat. "Mrs Tressady and I are going to start Mr Rogers here in business——"

"If you'd loan it to me at interest, sir——" Belle's young man began hoarsely. Belle laid her hand over Molly's, her voice tender and comforting—for Molly was weeping again.

"Don't cry, Mis' Tress'dy! It's all over now, and here we are safe and sound. We've nothing to cry over. Instead," said Belle, solemnly, "we'd ought to be thanking God that there was a member of the family here to look out for Timmy, instead of just that hired governess and the Chinee boys!"

THE KELLY KID

From *The Callahans and the Murphys*

"Glory be to the everlasting glory of God, but some harm will come to that child if they don't lock him up safe in jail!" said the Widow Cahill, with bitter feeling.

"They'll get 'um yet!" added the Widow Murphy, darkly.

Ellen Murphy laughed her fresh, delicious laugh. She found her mother, and her mother's gang, as she called it, extremely amusing. Ellen had come in, on this balmy June afternoon of lingering warmth and lingering summery odors, to make the usual daily report upon herself, and her sister Lizzie-Kate, and Lizzie-Kate's young family, all of whom lived some three blocks away from the maternal household. Also, she wanted to find somewhere the last summer's hat that might be cleaned and dyed, and she had seized the opportunity to wash and iron the real Irish collar and cuffs that made her thin dark silk office dress look so smart.

"You're a grand lot of glooms!" she told the elderly women, as she pressed the hot iron carefully upon the steaming lace. "I wonder you wouldn't sit in the hot kitchen, a day like this!"

"These are bad days out-o'-dures, wid all the flu that's in it," said the little cracked voice of the Widow Cahill, over the large, plain white china cup from which she was drinking strong tea. Mrs Cahill's bereavement had occurred some eleven years before, but never had an actress entered upon a congenial part more whole-heartedly than had the relict of Jarge Cahill assumed her weeds. He had been a bad husband living, but he was magnificent as dead, and Mrs Cahill still wore fountains of crape, shiny black kid gloves that kept even when empty the imprint of her lean little work-worn hands, and a heavy face veil that fell all over her shoulders in shrouding folds.

Still, cackling little Mrs Cahill was an optimist in the rather indirect Irish way, and Mrs Murphy, her hostess this afternoon, was a pessimist, pure and simple. Both these wrinkled, bereaved, stupid old souls looked to Ma Callahan, the third and last of the group today, for inspiration and guidance.

"I don't know is he bad, or is he just wild and free with the bold spirits that's in him," Mrs Callahan offered, now, of the Kelly boy, whose neighborhood escapades were under discussion. "I seen him yesterday," she resumed, after one of those mild pauses that marked all the conversations between these women, no matter how vital, "and I tuk it upon myself to stop him, and give 'um a word. 'Robert,' I says to 'um, 'yure good mother that's dead would turn in her grave if she could see the way you'll be carrying-on,' I says. He give me a bold, ugly look out

of his bold face——" she finished, her voice drifting into silence regretfully.

"Oh, he's a bad one!" Mrs Murphy contributed with feeling. "But this new cop on the beat, Hamilton, will get 'um!" she added, with vindictive enjoyment. "Ould Falley would never touch wan of thim boys, and they streelin' all over the place like Ayrabs! But this feller's a mean sort of weasel, and he'll get 'um. He got Jawnny Fay last week, and Big Jawnny give 'um such a lickin', when he heard that he'd been took to the Juvenile, that Rosy Fay come runnin' in here, the way she wouldn't hear the child holler!"

"Yes, and I think it was a dirty shame to arrest young Johnny," Ellen Murphy said, with warmth, as she pressed her iron gently along a scalloped edge. "It's the Kelly boy that's the ringleader, and he always goes scot-free. When Falley was on the beat, of course the whole pack of them knew they were safe," added Ellen, now holding the snowy fresh frill to the light, and scrutinizing it with keen blue eyes. "But this Hamilton is another pair of shoes——"

"I don't know where ever a cop would get a name like Hamilton," Mrs Cahill mused, dreamily.

"He's none of our sort," Mrs Callahan remarked. "He's a hard, mean kind of man, and God help Robbie Kelly the day he lays hands on 'um. Well, Robbie has a very ugly stepmother—she's a noisy, wild sort, Daze," she finished.

"He had a good mother," Mrs Murphy said, dolorously, "and she had him in Sunday School, and she dressed him very nice, until the very Sunday she was tuk, God rest her. And Mack Kelly wouldn't have been a bad father to 'um if he'd lived. But Daze has got that young boy of her own that's never been right since he had scarlet fever, and him teethin', and she's hard on Robbie. Sister Felix says that the child has a good heart in him, but he's wild. And he'll end in jail, and I'd never raise hand nor fut to keep him out of it!"

"Mama's never forgiven him about the baby goat," Ellen said, laughing. "Mama's old Kitty had a kid here one spring, and all the Eyetalians are crazy about young goats in the spring, and Robbie Kelly drove the baby goat over to the Baldocchis', and told Gemma Baldocchi that Mrs Murphy sent it with her compliments. Mama went down there—and the yelling!—and the screeching!—it was Duke's mixture, all right!" finished Ellen, enjoyable reminiscence in her eye.

Ellen's beauty and brightness had suffered a brief eclipse in the spring from the humiliating treatment of Mr John Beatty. But she was quite her radiant self now, and life once more was a brimming cup of sweets and excitements. She had rallied the more rapidly, from the smart and the shame, because his eyes had been so often upon her, and because it had been possible by presenting an invariably poised and indifferent front to humiliate him a little in turn.

He would ask her to a swell country club just to play a part, would he?

Ellen's thought had hummed as her flying fingers danced on the typewriter. He'd try to make a cat's-paw of Ellen Murphy! She rejoiced in open warfare as she had never rejoiced in unacknowledged love. She pushed her persecution of him to the limits of common charity, and beyond. Impassive, she stood beside him pointing out his errors, questioning his contradictory statements. His embarrassed laughter, his fumbling explanations, evoked no answering friendliness from her. Ellen, triumphing in her merciless young soul, told herself that she'd learn him to get fresh with her!

She was exhilarated with her rôle, and the united families of Murphy, Flint, and Kane admitted dispassionately that Ellen "had a healthy look on her, these days," or even that Ellen "tuk after the Florences in her looks, and they were a well-favored lot."

Ellen's old grandfather, however, who was sitting in the elm-shaded bare backyard this afternoon, with two of the Callahan grandchildren, often told her outright that she was beautiful, and Mr Clement Aloysius Riordan, whose company and adoration Ellen capriciously turned off or on like a hot-water faucet, was temporarily in favor at this time, and spared neither adjectives, panting breaths, deep, agonized flushes, nor brief, abashed laughs in attempting to assure her of her preëminent charm.

So Ellen was happy and indulgent this afternoon to "Mama's gang of perfect forty-fours"; her radiant youth had little concern with their dismal and funereal reminiscences, but she liked occasionally to spend an hour or two in their company, if only to make Dan, her brother, "die laughing" at her report upon them afterward.

"I'll tell you what," she said now, still in reference to the Kelly boy, "I don't know that it would hurt that kid to be sent up for awhile. He might learn some common sense. He's got no parents, his step-mother is going to marry again, and he says he won't live with his Aunt Lily in Troy. He'll go on his way until he kills someone, and then it'll be jail!"

"You'd wonder he wouldn't live with his Aunt Lily; she's a fine woman," said Mrs Cahill, her veil thrown back, her lean little liver-spotted face flushed with tea and sociability. "She has a good job in the liberry, and he could set there evenings, reading a story out of a book, until she'd be going home. She'd give him a good home, and she'd like to have him for company. Lily is a fine ger'rl," added Mrs Cahill, thoughtfully; "the Sisters had her for the Blessed Virgin wanst in the tabloos; she looked very elegant."

"Well, wouldn't you wonder at him?" agreed Mrs Murphy. "I'll go to the Judge myself, one of these days," she said, impressively, "and tell him that if ever there was a lad that a few years on the Island would do a world's world of good, me young gallant Robbie Kelly is the lad. I will so! I'll tell 'um that the boy could have a good home, with a fine ger'rl that's his own mother's sister, Lily Boone, but that he's so wild

he wants to run the streets, stealin' goats off of decent, respectable people that has need, God knows, of every penny——"

The conversation rambled up and down comfortably. Soft, warm early summer lingered kindly over the unlovely neighborhood, and the light, streaming through young leaves, pleasantly entered the shabby, dark, smoke-stained kitchen. The tin spoons and colanders that Mrs Murphy began in a desultory manner to employ in the first dinner preparations were black and shapeless with wear; some of them she had used for ten years, some twenty; she never thought of replacing them. A wire strainer with no handle had burned her fingers regularly three times a week, since Ellen was a baby; Dan had made round wooden knobs, clumsily botched together with wire, for her sauce-pan lids ten years before. Ellen and Jule and Lizzie-Kate had grown to womanhood, taking for granted the struggle with casseroles that leaked through cracks, coffee-pot tops that wedged in too tight, or else blew off entirely in a puff of brown foam; a chopping-bowl that had to be tipped up beyond the split that ran down one side or was useless, and an egg-beater that hitched and stuck once in every fifth revolution. Their mother always used a favorite little vegetable knife that had only the denuded spear of rusty steel left where once the wooden handle had been.

Mrs Callahan had the rocker so placed that by a long arm she could reach the teapot; Mrs Cahill sat at the end of the table; she occasionally cut a wedge of fresh bread from the loaf that was not yet quite free of the thin wrapping paper and the tangle of pink bakery string. Granulated sugar was in an open yellow-glass bowl covered with large, opaque glass warts, the sugar spoon was crusted with dried brown crystals from which the loose white sugar sifted. Mrs Murphy prized the sugar-bowl, which she had selected from a Wheel of Fortune at a Fair.

"I ought to be going, Mrs Murphy dear, to get the young children home," said Mrs Callahan, without stirring. "Poor Annie's going to take Martin up to visit Josie in Albany awhile, that he shouldn't be too well-informed as to what's goin' on——"

She gave a mild, significant glance toward Ellen, before whom Annie's unborn child might not with propriety be mentioned. The other elderly women nodded, and sighed, and there was a silence. Annie Callahan Curley had been widowed six months before, and the arrival of her fifth child was thus more than ordinarily a solemn event.

"Martin, mind you, is an angel of God," Mrs Callahan hastened to say of her foster-son, "but the child's eleven, and 'tis just as well he should be out of the way for awhile. Annie may go off tonight; she'll have a good visit with Josie and John, and when she comes back may the Lord send her a little comforter!"

There was no distinct "amen!" to this. But the others broke into an audible sighing and murmuring, with some shaking of heads, and much tut-tutting of lips. Mrs Callahan wiped her eyes. Mrs Cahill said "Whatever!" on a long, dolorous breath, and Mrs Murphy: "Betune us and all

har'rm, the help of God help the poor ger'rl!" And there was a sorrowful and sympathetic pause in the conversation.

It was broken by a stir in the yard, the approach of disturbance and danger sensed rather than actually seen. The women exchanged apprehensive glances; Ellen made an indeterminate move toward the door. Voices in the yard; then hammering steps upon the porch. Then the door was torn open, and upon a sobbing shout of defiance, fury, terror, and tears, a thin, dirty, torn, and tousled boy of perhaps twelve or fourteen rushed in. He was stammering and crying like a frantic little hunted animal; he saw neither the kitchen nor its occupants, but he saw the drophead sewing machine by the window and got behind it, and braced it between him and the door he had just entered.

"You dirty big liar!" he sobbed, his face streaming with tears and blood and dirt, his thin little chicken-breast rising and falling as if it would burst with the storm. "I never done it—you dirty liar! You can kill me—you can kill me—but you won't send me to jail! I'll get a pistol, and I'll blow your brains out—and I don't care if I do go to the chair—I don't care if I do go to the chair—you dirty big dirty liar——!"

His back was toward the stupefied occupants of the kitchen. But everyone of them knew him, of course; the Kelly boy.

Mrs Murphy automatically soused the end of the mud-colored towel under the cold-water faucet, and as she addressed her unexpected guest she was wiping his forlorn, still-sputtering face. She had not lived in this neighborhood forty years for nothing, nor was this her first experience of this sort.

"Here, what's all this to-do?" she demanded, equably. "This is a fine way to bur'rst in upon a Christian woman! What have you been up to now, Robbie Kelly? I shouldn't wonder if the police are after you again!"

The cold water had somewhat sobered the child, but he was still panting as he clawed her hands with his own lean little hard ones, and gasped:

"Oh, Mis' Murphy, don't let him get me! Hamilton's after me—the cop's after me and Lenny Spillane! Oh, Mis' Murphy, honest to God, I never done nothin'. It was them big fellers that was foolin' with the switch, and Len and me was just lookin' at what they done——"

"My God! There's been a train wreck!" shouted Mrs Cahill.

"No, there wasn't no wreck!" the child said, quickly, his face white when the dirt and blood had been washed away. "But the cop says there might have been, and he says he's going to have me up before Judge Casey—and Casey told me last time, he'd send me up to Randall's Island! But I'll kill him first," gritted little Robbie Kelly, his teeth set, his tears breaking forth afresh as he turned his desperate eyes once more toward the door.

"It's a pity you wouldn't think of that, Robbie, before now," Mrs Callahan said, mildly. "There's some that loved your good mother that thinks maybe you'd be better off for a few years, until you'd be eighteen

or so, shut up where you couldn't do anny harm. Manny's the time I've disputed you about it, that you should go to your good aunt, and be a comfort to her, and sell a few *Posts* like Martin does, and grow up a decent man. But no, you'd be stravagin' the neighborhood, like a wild Turk that has no God itself, and now look what's in it!"

"I'll go to Aunt Lily—say, if you'll lend me the money for my ticket I'll go, if you'll just get me off this once!" Robbie promised, breathlessly. "Honest I will—I know the way! If you'll get me off with the cop——"

"So that you can run off wid me goats again!" Mrs Murphy interpolated, drily, in the troubled pause.

"Mrs Callahan, won't you *please*—won't you please, for the love of God and the Blessed Virgin——!" the Kelly boy begged her, beside himself with terror and urgency. "I'll go to my aunt, and I'll help her—I'll split wood for her and run her errands—you'll not be sorry—honest—*honest*—I promise you if I never promised anything in my life——!"

"For Heaven's sake, Robbie Kelly," Ellen said, impatient and distressed, "why on earth didn't you think of all this before? You could have gone to your aunt when your mother died, and entered school there, and tried to make something of yourself. And now you come in with your promises and everything, when the cop's after you, and he's a new cop—nobody likes him, and his hand is against everybody! You got the Fay boy into trouble, and that was the very first time, and you've been up twice before Judge Casey, and you know how mad anything with the railroad makes him, because they're all down on him, anyway——"

She put her ironing-board away with a bump, and there was a long silence in the kitchen. The Kelly boy still panted; his eyes roved despairingly from one face to another. Mrs Murphy had pursed her lips, taken a chair, pressed a weazened little hand over her shut eyes, and was swaying from side to side with a rotary sort of movement indicative of utter helplessness. Mrs Cahill cleaned her teeth with whistling sounds of her lips; her sharp, faded, scrutinizing gaze resting impassively upon the agitated face and the shabby, dirty, tumbled young figure. Ellen rested her shoulder against the bedroom door, her arms folded, her face exasperated and yet sympathetic, and Mrs Callahan, in the low rocker, had a big hand planted upon each knee, her magnificent leonine head dropped a little forward, her handsome black eyes thoughtful and troubled.

"I could go with ye to the Judge, Robbie," she suggested, after awhile. "But I think he'll send ye up—the third time. I declare if your good mother wouldn't rather see you in your grave——"

Robbie's face wrinkled, all the fire and fight died out of him, and standing shamed and forlorn before them he began to cry great tears that ran down his freckled face and crept saltily into his trembling mouth. He was little, guilty, helpless, and inevitable punishment faced him.

"I tell you I never done it!" he said, stubbornly.

"You've done enough, God knows," Mrs Cahill reminded him, inexorably, but without rancor.

"But I never done that!" sobbed Robbie, "and if he takes me and sends me to jail, I'll *tell* him I never done it! He can send me to the chair—because he's a big liar, but I'll tell the Judge that if my mother had lived I'd tell her the same thing—and if I was dying I'd tell it——"

The frantic, incoherent threats died stilly into the air. Robbie gulped, sniffled wetly, and gratefully grasped the handkerchief that Ellen supplied. Young, thin, shabby, and friendless, with the great machinery of the law set in motion to catch him, he wept into Ellen's little blue lawn handkerchief with the orange butterfly.

"Whisht!" breathed Mrs Cahill, electrically. "There's the cop in the yard!"

An instant change took place among all present. Stepping with the silent agility of a deer, Mrs Cahill opened the door into the bedroom, three feet from the yard door. The Kelly boy's tears dried, his eyes flashed courage and defiance again as Ellen laid her hand upon his shabby shoulder, and he and she vanished through the bedroom door like smoke.

Mrs Callahan was comfortably enjoying a cup of tea, and Mrs Cahill pulling on her dismal black gloves, her veil down as preparatory to departure, when Mrs Murphy stepped innocently to answer an authoritative rap upon the porch door.

She blinked at the visitor, a tall, stalwart, freshly uniformed young man with a truculent red face.

"Well, God bless us, it's Officer Hamilton, will ye step in?" she said, with an air of pleased surprise.

Officer Hamilton sent a lightning glance about the kitchen, smiled with no warmth, and stepped in. He sat down in a low chair, and dandled his cap upon his knee.

"Mrs Callahan you know, and me friend Mrs Cahill. I misdoubt ye don't know the whole pack of us hereabouts," Mrs Murphy said, socially. "You wouldn't have a cup of tea while you'd be talkin'? And now what is it—it isn't the Fourth of July barbecue yet awhile?"

Officer Hamilton looked from one to the other with a dreadful and unhurried smile. The smile said that they knew why he was there, and they knew that he knew they knew, and that business as important as his, authority as unquestioned, might suffer an occasional pause, but could never evade satisfaction.

"Come now—come now——" he said, with an indulgent smile. The three women exchanged glances almost too exquisitely bewildered.

"Well—whatever is it—all this is very strange——" said these innocent glances.

"Did ye see me ould father out in the yard that we had anointed awhile back?" Mrs Murphy questioned him conversationally.

"Yes, I seen Mr Florence, and lookin' extremely well and hearty,

too," said the officer, leisurely indulgent, inexorable. "I'm after the Kelly kid. Where is he?"

"After——? Is it young Robbie Kelly?" Mrs Callahan asked.

"Him and young Spillane," announced Mr Hamilton, with a brief nod, as one who appreciates that he imparts—as indeed he was imparting, well-known facts. "It's the first time Spillane has been caught, and I left him off again. But me young friend Robbie," he resumed, grimly, "goes up to the Judge on Monday, and I don't doubt they'll learn him to evade the law before they're done with him!"

"I wonther that you could be doin' all that, and you widout a warrant or annything whativer," Mrs Cahill said, the soft accents of the Tralee mountains wrapping each word as in cotton wool.

"He's here all right, I seen him bolt into the yard. Where is he?" the man persisted, brushing aside these mild diversions.

"I don't know why you would chase the poor child, annyway," Mrs Murphy said, with some decision, from the sink, "but whativer you do, it's neither sign nor sound of 'um you'll find in my kitchen. He'd be conthrivin' to pass out of the neighborhood entirely, I should presume, and not loither about the way you'd put hands on 'um. He's a very spry young lad, if I have 'um rightly——"

"Come, now—come, now!" Officer Hamilton interrupted her in a slow drawl, with significantly smiling eyes. "You give me your word he's not here," he added, with a first touch of asperity, "you give me your word he's not here, and I'll believe you!"

"Where would he be?" Mrs Murphy asked, in elaborate innocence. "Look in me little butthry—you couldn't be hiding a young cat and his kittens in there!"

She flung open the door of a large closet, where indeed nothing more concealing that an open flour barrel met the officer's quick and dissatisfied glances.

"Mama——" began Ellen, from the bedroom doorway. "Oh, how do you do, Mr Hamilton?" she interrupted herself, with a smile that made her dazzling young beauty even more radiant. "Mrs Cahill, would you step in here and say good-by to Aunt Susie, and you, too, Mrs Callahan?" she asked, with a glance straight into each woman's eyes in turn. "Did Mama tell you me aunt is in there quite laid up with the arthritis?" Ellen continued prettily, as the two guests lumbered obediently into the bedroom. "You'll want to look in there," she added, to the officer. "These boys in the neighborhood, they're an awful care to you, I daresay," Ellen continued, obliterating from the impressionable heart of Thomas Hamilton with a suddenness that made his senses reel, an imprint lately left there by Miss Rita O'Connor of Center Moriches. "I'll take you in there!" she promised.

"I'll be stepping on along home, Mrs Murphy," Mrs Callahan said, comfortably, from the bedroom doorway, "for it's small use a house has for company, with the police in it! Your aunt looks better, and I don't

doubt she'll be up amongst us, and herself again, in a day or two, and God grant it!"

"And I'll go along wid Mrs Callahan," Mrs Cahill said, following. "Faith—I left me bag on the bed!"

She dove back into the bedroom, and immediately afterward the two widows departed, murmuring together, and stopping to speak to old man Florence in the yard, where Mrs Callahan gathered up her two staggering grandchildren.

"Stop in whin you're passin'!" Mrs Murphy shouted after them hospitably. "Now, sir," she said somewhat truculently to the officer, "you've looked into me butthry, and you've druv me friends off of me house, and what else can I do for ye?"

Officer Hamilton was watching Ellen Murphy with shrewdly smiling eyes.

"Did you know that I delayed on my way here to ask Officer Burns to just keep an eye on your windows, Miss Murphy?" he asked.

The girl flushed honestly and indignantly.

"Well, I don't know why you'd do that, Mr Hamilton," she said, coldly.

"So that nobody could help anybody else out of one of them, for instance," he told her, with a sort of quiet triumph.

"There's nobody in that room there but my Aunt Susan, sick in bed," Ellen asserted, stoutly, with a shrug. "I don't know what you're driving at!"

"And if you arrest that child—and you with neither warrant nor writ—a child that's got no mother, and whatever has he done but just a few thricks that would make a decent man laugh at 'um, let alone arrest 'um!——" Mrs Murphy began shrilly.

"It's my business to see that the law is respected," Hamilton said, inflexibly. "If he's not here, I'm sure I'm sorry that I broke up your tea-party. And if you'll let me give one look at—that—sick—aunt—of yours," he added, addressing Mrs Murphy, but with his eyes fixed on Ellen, and his drawling tone full of meaning for her, "then I'll thank you, and take my leave!"

"Saving your presence, my aunt's not young, and she's sick in bed," Ellen offered, with a reluctance so betraying and so undisguised that Officer Hamilton suspected that a distressed and hopeless shaking of the head would begin, on the mother's part, and smiled again when he detected it.

"It's no use, Ellen," said Mrs Murphy's frightened lips, making no sound. Ellen gripped her mother's arm with firm fingers, and the officer of the law with only a premonitory rap opened the bedroom door.

"Run, Robbie—run for your life!" the older woman shouted. Afterward she denied having said this, and added that if the child had been there, which she well knew he wasn't, she thought he might as well make a run for it.

Thomas Hamilton opened the bedroom door, and stood there, with one watchful eye never leaving the kitchen. He saw a shabby, plain room, with no place in it that would hide even the aforementioned young cat "and his kittens," with a narrow iron bed protruding into the center of the floor, and in the bed an indubitable old woman.

There was no mistaking her wrinkled old face, her thinning grizzled hair, her claw-like old hands. No Robbie Kelly—were he the child Coquelin—could assume that mask, that cracked old voice. The invalid wore a sodden but brilliantly flowered kimono; there was no suspicious hump of fugitive childhood at her feet, the floor under the bed was empty except for a collapsed hat-box, a heap of Sunday newspapers, a brick, two pairs of crushed and shapeless shoes, a string of empty cereal boxes long used by some child as a cart, and several curls of dust that lay shamelessly upon the unpainted rough boards.

Hanging on the wall opposite the door was a forlorn row of garments, but from under them no Kelly boots protruded. And through the small panes of the one window Officer Hamilton could see the back of Officer Burns, elaborately casual, loitering up and down the block.

That was all. There was no wardrobe, no closet, no other door. Officer Hamilton flushed, and scratched his head, and glanced dubiously into the kitchen again. There was a third room, but the window from this gave upon the back porch, as the kitchen door did, and the doorway into it had been quite frankly open all the time. It contained a dark jumble of comforters and boots and odd meaningless garments, and was known as "Grandpa's room."

Officer Hamilton, without moving, glanced toward the street, and blew his whistle, and Officer Burns immediately straightened alertly and came into the shanty.

"The boy's here somewhere, Burns," said the harassed Hamilton, "and we've got to find him!"

"If you weren't the best dancer ever, Frank," said Ellen Murphy to Officer Burns, with a killing glance, "I'd have you both arrested for breaking into Mama's house, and scaring the wits out of us all."

"Here's the thing, Miss Ellen," returned Frank Burns, kindly regretful. "The boy's been making trouble for everybody. It'll be for his own good that he's shut up awhile; it'll teach him a lesson!"

"Teach him all the lessons you want to, Frank, although I'll bet you weren't any Child Ignatius yourself, if I remember rightly, when you were his age!" Miss Murphy began, smoothly. "But don't waste time running around annoying people worse than a hundred Kelly kids could annoy them——"

"And him a posthumious child that never seen hide nor hair of his own father, that died on him before he was born——!" her mother added, in a high wail.

"Do you know what he did?" Frank Burns demanded, fiercely, as his colleague trampled sternly through old man Florence's lair. "Him and

young Spillane was monkeying with the railway switch. Now—if you have an accident there, Miss Ellen," he pleaded, with a sudden change of tone, his handsome, clean-shaven, kind young face gravely concerned, "it's manslaughter. You don't want anything like that breaking loose in our neighborhood. Now, do you?"

Ellen was visibly moved. She looked down.

"But don't you have to have warrants, and search-warrants, and all that sort of thing, to do this, Frank?" she asked, with a sudden upward and most disquieting glance.

"Isn't it better to have him in a corrective institution for a few years, instead of in jail for life?" Frank countered, grasping at phrases that edified and surprised himself as well as everyone else.

"Ah, but there's no harm in a child like that!" Ellen pleaded in turn.

"Cellar?" said Thomas Hamilton to Mrs Murphy, indicating a trap-door in the floor with his big, shining boot.

"There is not," returned the mistress of the house, "and lucky thim that needs thim in these days!" she added, darkly.

Hamilton, incredulously, opened the flap, discovered a neatly embedded bathtub, in which some onions and turnips and a can of kerosene were odorously stored, and looked apologetic and somewhat foolish.

"Well, now, where is he?" he asked, looking about with a slight amelioration of his harsh attitude. "He run in here—we both seen that. You can't hide him forever; it can't be done. I'll nab him the minute I lay eyes on him, and it'll only go the worse for him if I have to tell the Court that he run off on me. Resisting the law——"

"A kid runnin' away from a cop isn't resistin' the law," Ellen interpolated, smartly. "I'll bet you used to run from them yourself, and think nothing at all about it! The child didn't do anything; he said himself that he and the Spillane boy——"

"Aha!" cried Officer Hamilton, triumphantly, "he *was* in here then?"

The girl flushed, bit her lip, looked up, looked down.

"Well, what if he was?" she demanded. "He run off again. He just run by, through the yard, and through the back gate out onto the hill."

"There's a pat' goes down past Harrison's place, that you'd be takin' and you steppin' to the market," Mrs Murphy supplied circumstantially.

"He did not," Officer Burns said, good-naturedly and flatly. "I never took my eyes off the house."

"Well, wouldn't you think we was all the one for lies and inthrigues," Mrs Murphy commented, in almost admiring wonder. "That's the police for it," she added, "they'll find you a murther as aisy as you'd pick up a button you'd dhropped on the flure. 'Clap him into jail,' says they, 'and we'll find means and ways to keep 'um there!' There was a feller back in the ould country, and him a dacint, God-fearin' lad that had a cousin at Maynooth itself, and the good mother he had on him——"

"Come on, where is he, Miss Ellen?" Frank Burns said, coaxingly, uninterested in this moving recital.

"Do you think, if I knew where he was, which I don't," Ellen said, briskly, "that I'd let you haul out that poor little fellow, and keep him in the Juvenile Detention two days—among thieves and God knows what, and then have him up before old Casey, to ruin his life on him? Shame on you! You and Mr Hamilton are in a fine business chasing a child around the block, with the speeders right here on South Street killing nuns and Eyetalian babies and dear knows what all——"

"God help your husband, Ellen, when you get going!" said Mr Burns, admiringly.

"Well, I hope He will!" the girl responded, warmly. "I'll go out and bring Grandpa in, Mama," she added, turning her back upon the forces of the law. "If you've both looked your fill of my aunt's room," she said, witheringly to the men, as she left the kitchen, "I hope you'll excuse my shutting the door, she's trying to get some sleep!"

"This'll all be told to the Judge——" Mr Hamilton warned her, baffled and bewildered, but still determined, and somewhat red in the face.

"You'll tell him more than your prayers, I don't doubt that," Mrs Murphy muttered, bitterly, again busy at her sink.

"Say, Dan, you help us out here." Frank Burns said, good-naturedly, as Daniel Murphy, thirty-five, weazened, looking alertly from one to the other, came home after his hard day.

Daniel kissed his mother.

"How's Aunt Susan?" he asked, sitting down at the table.

"Better. She's had aspirin, and she's drowsy," Ellen, now tenderly engineering her old grandfather in his armchair, answered briskly, as her mother looked a little vague.

"Here's the way of it, Dan. Hamilton and I don't like to butt in here," Officer Burns said, uncomfortably. "But you know that kid in the neighborhood that they call the Kelly kid?"

"Sure. Knew his mother," Dan responded, his weasel-bright eyes still traveling from one face to the other as he rapidly and lightly chewed gum with his front teeth.

"Well, he and that Spillane boy were monkeying with a railroad switch today——" Officer Burns pleaded, almost pathetically.

"Holy Nelly!" Dan said, gratifyingly impressed. He stopped chewing.

"States Prison offence!" Officer Hamilton supplied, with a grim nod.

"I'll tell the world!" Dan affirmed, beginning to chew again.

"Now, he's got to answer for that," the other officer said, logically. "I want to run him in. You've got to break up that gang of his, you know. Isn't it better that one kid should be punished, and scare the daylights out of the rest of them?"

"Sure," Dan conceded, nodding non-committally as he chewed.

"Well, he run in here, into this house," pursued Burns. "We both seen that. Hamilton whistled for me, and I come in the other end of the block; he didn't pass me. And he never walked out the path at the back of the house, either, I seen that as I come along. We've got him, Dan, wherever

the ladies has hid him. There hasn't been a soul come in or go out——"

"Come through, Mama, where is he?" Dan said, grinning. "They won't do him no hurt, Ellen. Cough him up. Maybe the Judge will let him off, anyway."

"He haven't set fut here or hereabouts," Dan's mother asserted in her high, shrill, plaintive wail of a voice. "I never seen nor heard the like of the questions these two officers has been askin'! They've waked yure aunt out of a sleep that might be life or death to her——"

"What's under them rugs?" demanded Officer Hamilton suddenly, his eyes fixed upon a nondescript mass of bedding, floor-covering, old carpets, and variegated garments that formed a sort of mountain against one wall.

Instantly Ellen was standing before it, her eyes flashing.

"It's just nothing but rubbish!" she said, with an excited laugh. "It's—it's—Dan—Mama——"

"It's been there this fortnight, until I could sort it all out for the Sisters' Rummidge Sale they're going to have," Mrs Murphy said, bewilderedly. "Sure you couldn't hide a Galway pig there——"

"Just kindly take my word for it——" Ellen said, fiercely, to Frank Burns, as he looked at her inquiringly.

"I'm sorry I can't!" Hamilton had seized a broom, the heap was rifled in a few seconds.

It revealed old coats thick with age and hard wear, old derby hats pathetically dented and browned, old collars tied together with a boot lace, a jumble of paper patterns, faded cottons, disreputable boots, and one or two worn, small crêpe nightgowns in which yellowed ribbons still were knotted.

Ellen's face blazed as to a murmured accompaniment of embarrassed apologies she restored some sort of outward order to the unsavory heap.

"We've had enough of this nonsense!" she said, sharply. "Probably the Kelly kid has made Brooklyn by this time; I hope he has! He's got cousins there, and there's plenty of people he knows there! If you'll be so kind as to vacate the premises, I'll get my grandfather's milk toast ready for him——"

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"That was a queer turn, Frank," said Officer Hamilton, as the two walked slowly down the block. "She's double-crossing me somewhere, that girl. The kid ran in there, and I didn't turn my back two minutes, I'll swear that. I looked over your way, and I run about twenty feet with my back to the house——"

"Well, I guess that was the time," Frank Burns said, yawning, and deciding to buy a dollar ticket for St Rose's Ball and Raffle a week from tonight, and see for himself who was running with Ellen Murphy just now. "She's a beauty, isn't she?" he said.

"Yes," the other man conceded, still abstracted and still smarting. "I'm

going to watch that house, Frank," he threatened. "And I'm going to tell Moore to. That's all I can do. And soon or later I'll get that kid."

"I'll bet on Ellen Murphy," young Burns said. "You'll see that nothing'll happen there tonight."

The prophecy was fulfilled. Unless, mused Officer Hamilton, walking up and down under the summer stars, and the street lights, and the softly moving new foliage of the elms, unless the arrival of old Mrs Callahan and her adopted son was an event. Hamilton knew little Martin Callahan, who was as good a boy as the Kelly kid was bad, using his spare energies normally in ball-games and tramps and the building of tepees and forts.

"Hello, Martin," he said, as they passed him, "I thought you was going up to your aunt's in Albany tonight?"

"I may go tomorow," Martin said, shifting the bundle he carried.

"My daughter got off tonight, but he may foller her and he may not," Mrs Callahan contributed, politely, as they went on their way. Hamilton watched them suspiciously; had there been laughter under those demure voices? Laughter at what?

Had he followed them into the Murphy kitchen his vaguely uneasy question would have been fully answered. For there was laughter there.

Dan Murphy laughed in little violent squirts that convulsed his shrewd little lean face and wrinkled his apple cheeks. Mrs Callahan laughed with a great shaking, as of an earthquake, and anon wiped her eyes, and anon burst into crying laughter and choked and sobbed with the sheer felicity of it all over again. Ellen laughed until she had to lay her bright, bobbed mahogany head down on the table. Young Martin laughed sympathetically, looking from one to the other a little curiously with his nice boy's eyes, and even Mrs Murphy laughed sourly and reluctantly, her mouth bursting into wrinkles, and her frowning forehead relaxing.

The old man was long in bed and asleep, but there was a sixth person in the kitchen, and she laughed, too. Old Mrs Cahill, again veiled and shawled after her brief incarceration in Dan's bed, sobbed, sputtered, whimpered, and gasped with the rest.

"He—he looked——" Mrs Callahan's handsome, good face, with its motherly, sweet-tempered lines, broke suddenly into crinkles. "Oh, the dear Lord preserve us!" she whispered, under her breath, ashamed of her uncontrollable mirth, and assuming a dignified expression that made the others laugh again. "Whin Hamilton give me a good clear look, as we wint out," she said rapidly, and with shaking accents, "me heart died on me! And whin Robbie Kelly walked with me into me kitchen, dressed for all the world like a widow that's lost her husband—well, I thought Annie Curley would drop dead where she stud!"

"Did he get off with Annie?" Mrs Murphy asked, for the mere pleasure of hearing it all repeated.

"As easy as kiss your hand," the other woman assured her. "He had Mart's old overcoat onto him, and they walked out of the house as quiet

as birds. And they got the six o'clock from town; he'll stay at Josie's tonight, and go to his aunt tomorrow, and nobody the wiser. The poor child! He kissed me good-by as solemn as a priest. I wouldn't wonder would he be a Bishop yet!"

"When Hamilton asked what was under the carpets——!" Ellen sobbed joyfully.

"My God, the dirty look you give him, Ellen!" her brother said, admiringly, "when you let out that you'd seen the kid!"

"Oh, but the best of all, Dan," his sister said, exulting, "was when you walked in and asked how was Aunt Susan! I thought I'd faint away——"

"Hadn't I just met Mrs Callahan, and had it all out of her, and she running down the street to get the child a cap?" Dan demanded, in high feather. "'Go home, Dan,' she says, 'and see what-all's in it, with the Kelly kid and your mother and Ellen and all!'"

"So I did," Mrs Callahan said, solemnly. "Those were me words!"

"I stipt back into your room, Dan," Mrs Cahill boasted, "and I joomped out of me old dress and t'rew the veil over his head. 'Beat it,' I says. Wid that, Mrs Callahan begun to talk to 'um. 'Mrs Cahill,' she says, 'will you l'ave me have a tasteen of your buttermilk the night?' she says. Oh, dear Lord, preserve and defind us by the glory and goodness of God!" exclaimed the widow, "out they walked, wit'in t'ree inches of Hamilton's nose itself——!"

"We'll miss the child," Mrs Murphy said, solemnly, in a long pause.

"We will that," Mrs Callahan agreed, sighing. "Never will I forget the night him and the Spillane boy tuk two old carriage lamps, and wint out onto the highway," she mused. "And whin a car was coming along in the dark, would they move up to it as if they was another autymobile until they was within fifteen feet, and thin the two of them split, and one go each side of the poor feller that was tryin' to drive——"

"The day he took Annie's baby and put Katie Oliver's kid in the coach," Ellen added.

"Oh, the Lord be good to us, that was a day!" said Annie's mother.

Mrs Murphy, having swabbed up every possible dark, damp, and dingy corner of the sink and table with a muddy rag, and having carefully spread the rag, greasy, odorous, and warm, across the bottom of the inverted dishpan, now showed signs of tears. She seated herself on the foot of the old red box-lounge, where Dan was spread luxuriously, and he drew up his feet for better accommodation. His mother would sleep here, later, but now the piece of furniture was merely a lounge.

"Bad luck to the police that'd run him out of the neighborhood!" she said, resentfully.

"I was thinkin' I might have him down for Christmas wid Rose's children," Mrs Cahill said.

"He could run around with Martin," suggested Mrs Callahan. "There's no harm to the child."

"I'll send Lily Boone a fiver, next Christmas, and ask him down," Dan contributed.

"We'll get Josie and John to keep an eye on him, and see he has a good time," Ellen added.

A long silence fell. Dan smoked, and Ellen manicured her pretty hands. She and Mrs Cahill and Mrs Callahan were simultaneously entertaining vague ideas of departure; young Martin was exultant at finding himself out of bed at half-past nine; Mrs Murphy, whose nose was always moist, sniffled, rocked to and fro, sighed, and clicked her false teeth.

"Oh, well, they're always persecutin' somebody," she conceded to the cruel world, suddenly. "Look at the way they treated the Lord!"

GRAND CENTRAL PICKUP

From *Baker's Dozen*

After a while the girl said steadily and audibly:

"Is there any chance of your taking me to dinner?"

Her neighbor glanced about him. He and she were alone on the end of the long railway station bench, although hundreds of home-going commuters, coming and going about them, made the spot one of the most populated and least isolated in the entire world. Satisfied, if still surprised, that she was speaking to him, he said simply:

"Why?"

The girl, an eager, handsome creature plainly but not shabbily dressed, edged nearer.

"Not what you think," she said eagerly. "I'm not hungry. I've—look, I've plenty of money; it isn't that. It's just that—I would so horribly like to go to dinner with someone!"

Her big white teeth showed in an appealing smile; her words rushed on.

"I'm working," she said. "I've got a good job! But—but it's spring. I've been sitting here wishing that someone—any one of all these people getting on and off trains—was going to meet me. It's so lovely to meet people, and hold out your hands, and laugh and cry, and perhaps have them kiss you! I think," she went on as the man watched her with a sympathetic smile dawning in his eyes, "I think that when I'm rich I'll hire someone to meet me places and rush at me and say, 'Mary darling!'"

"Is your name Mary?"

The girl's happy color rushed up and her eyes danced at his tone. He was not going to snub her; he was not going to get up and walk away!

"No, but the girls people meet usually seem to be Marys, don't they?" she asked animatedly. "I've been waiting here almost since you were, I imagine," she went on. "Your friend isn't coming, is he? Was he due at six exactly? That's when you kept looking at your watch and at the clock."

"You're observant," the man said, smiling. "No, I don't imagine he's coming now. He was a small boy, and I was to take him to his grandmother for the Easter vacation. But probably they sent up the car for him and couldn't get hold of me to let me know. Shall we dine?"

He stood up and the girl stood up, and he got a fair look at her and saw that hers was a fine and an intelligent face. Perhaps she saw something in his face at the same time that impressed her, for she said in quick flushed apology: "Is this an awful thing to do?"

"Nothing awful about it. We're civilized people. We both have to eat."

"Was it your own small boy you were meeting?"

"No. I'm not married, Miss——I don't know your name?"

"I'd so much rather you didn't, if you don't mind. And don't tell me yours. You can call me Miss Anything——"

"Why not Mary?"

"Mary, if you will. And tell me something to call you," the girl said, mounting the rise to the street at his side. "We'll have dinner and then say good-night, and that'll be all. I don't want to know who you are and I'm sure you don't want to know who I am. We'll disappear at about eight o clock, like drops into the ocean, and never see each other again. But by just doing this," she ended with a momentary return to her eager, almost distressed manner, "you'll do me the greatest favor in the world. Really you will! You don't mind terribly, do you—what'll I call you?"

"You might call me John. It isn't my name."

"John, then. I love the name of John! Back home I had a friend—he wasn't a beau, he was in love with my chum, and she died of tuberculosis. His name was John."

"Where are we going? Where are your confederates waiting for me with the gas pipe?" John asked. The girl laughed.

"Not any place too swanky, but with music and lights and freesias and —spring!" she decreed. "Quiet, so we can talk."

"But if we aren't to know each other's names how can we talk? And how can I ever meet you anywhere and say 'Mary darling!' unless I know what you're doing?"

She did not answer. They had entered a big Park Avenue hotel now, and John was guiding her through the empty tables to a quiet corner where they could hear the soft music and watch the show without being seen. The evening was still early: it was not yet seven o'clock; unwonted soft twilight lingered in the streets and at the windows, and the scent not only of freesias, but of roses and stock and all the sweet spring flowers was in the air.

"Oh, this is so lovely!" Mary said at last, when they were seated near an open window and when she had loosened her plain coat to show a smart if well-worn frock with crisp lines of fresh white at wrists and throat. She stopped to sniff the violets on the table, looked about in immense satisfaction at the almost empty room, breathed deep in satisfaction. "This is exactly what I wanted to do!" she said. And then gratefully, with a flash of her wide smile for him, she added: "You're awfully kind to do this!"

"Not at all," the man said. "I had to dine anyway. Why not in the company of an attractive girl?"

"Yes, you had to say that of course," Mary said hastily, almost abstractedly, "but you're very kind just the same! I've been in an office and a boardinghouse and the subway all day—and all yesterday—and for weeks—and months," she said, appealing to him simply, "and I imagine I sort of lost my mind! You think I'm crazy, of course."

"No, I don't. I don't think you're crazy at all." He was a charming man, really, with his pleasant voice and his kind, courteous manner, she thought. "I can imagine how you felt, although I've never been in exactly that position," he said. "I've never lived in a boardinghouse, I mean. I've always had my family around me."

"Your family is probably wondering where you are now, then?" Mary said on a rising tone.

"Oh no, I'm quite alone now. I've an apartment up here on Fifty-fourth. My mother's——There's nobody here but myself now. No," John said with his nicest smile, "I'm enjoying this adventure, and I wish you would!"

"If you only knew how I *am!*" She had removed her coat and had done something swift and adroit to complexion and lips and the waves of hair that showed under her hat; she was a handsome girl, but it was a fine rather than a pretty face.

"Well, let's talk," said John. "You were tired of the office and the boardinghouse and the subway. So what?"

"So I really didn't want to go home. I call it a boardinghouse, but it isn't, really. I wish it were!" Mary said. "It's just two old Germans, a man and his wife, both over sixty. There are only two boarders, myself and an old Fräulein who has a job as a companion; she only comes home once a week or so. It gets horribly quiet and lonely! The old lady—I call her Tante—is the sort that reads all the papers and does all the puzzles and talks about all the lost-and-found advertisements; she reads them aloud to the doctor. He's got bad eyes. And she cooks him noodles and sausages and things like that—all good, you know, but not exciting. But the house is clean, and the sheets are linen, and I only pay—I'd be ashamed to tell you what—and then they knew my mother, and they love me—they call me Liebchen, and that makes it nice. But it *is* dull!"

"What about the nice young man from the office who asks you to go to pictures with him?" John asked.

"Oh, he?" Her color came up in the pretty swift rush, as it had a fashion of doing. She laughed. "I tell him no. I'm not interested. Seriously," she said, "there isn't any such person."

"Why not?"

"Well . . . I don't know. But if there had been some nice man—I don't mean a sweetheart, but some good friend—waiting to take me to dinner, or a picture, or anywhere tonight," Mary expanded it, "I wouldn't have——

"And I don't know why I did," she interrupted herself to say, studying his face with a puzzled little smile. "Except that you looked—friendly, and not too young——"

"That's the first thing you've said that I don't like!" John protested. "I'm thirty-four. One still has an interest in life at thirty-four."

They laughed together and were friends, and suddenly to both it

seemed pleasantly exciting to be dining together in the hotel dining room, with the lights softened and the music playing.

"Here we are," John said. "In a city of seven million, having dinner and talking like old friends, and not knowing each other's names!"

"And we mustn't know each other's names," the girl said with an alarmed look. "We must never see each other again. This is a complete adventure in itself. That's what makes it so romantic! It's an Arabian Night."

"I've been thinking," her companion said, "that names are strange things. If you told me yours it wouldn't mean anything to me, and yet I'd feel I really knew you. Not knowing it, I'm completely at sea. If you said Henrietta Johnson or Marjorie Bates it really wouldn't mean any more than Mary, but I'd feel that it did."

"The only thing that saves me from complete *shame* is that you don't know my name," the girl said seriously. "I think of myself, asking a strange man to take me to dinner, talking to him in a railway station, and all that saves me is to think, 'Ah well, he doesn't know me, and he never will!' "

"I know quite a few things about you," John said. "You're smart and quick-witted and—and you're a lady, and you have a keen sense of humor. I think that's a good deal to know."

"You're very nice to put the 'lady' in, after my carryings on in the station," Mary said gratefully. "I don't suppose a man has any idea how awful it is to be a decent girl and not to know how to have any fun—to get started having fun. Any girl," she added thoughtfully, "any girl feels that once she got *started* she could keep the ball rolling. But how to get started?"

"I suppose that *is* a problem."

"Problem! And there are just a few years, you know, and they simply *race*. You're nineteen—and then you're twenty-four—and then you're thirty, like lightning!"

"You'd be—what? Twenty—what?"

"I'm pushing twenty-seven, as we say in old Ireland. I wish it was sixteen! But since we're not to see each other again you may as well know the stark, unvarnished truth."

Her eyes were grayish blue; the lashes thick and black. Her mouth was large; her complexion pale and clear except when she flushed; it was delightful to see the color rush up under its transparence. Her hair had a certain warmness in its brown, like cherrywood; she had a fine, thin, long hand, ivory-clean, with blue veins showing at the wrist. Her coat, her hat, her bag, her silk dress were all dark blue; she had pearls in her ears and a small string of creamy pearls about her round creamy throat. On her high cheekbones were a few fine pale freckles; her voice had a husky note in it. Leaning on the table, with the warm lamplight touching the lines of her chin and throwing the shadow of her eyelashes on her cheeks, John found her charming.

He told her his college had been Yale; they talked of books and of shows; at eight o'clock he left her for a few minutes and came back with two slim tickets fanned in his hand.

"We're going to see a play. I don't know anything about it!" he said. He sat down, laughing. "Did you think I was leaving you to pay the check?" he asked.

"I did have an awful moment! But I've money enough," the girl said. She resumed the look of rapture his question had for an instant interrupted. "Oh, not *The Beehive!*" she gasped. "I've not seen it. Oh, but how *wonderful* of you! You didn't have to do that!"

"I know I didn't have to do that. But you said you'd not seen it, and I've not seen it either. It seemed a good chance. What'll we do if anyone recognizes us and says, 'Hello, Archibald,' or 'Hello, Susanna'?"

"Nobody'll recognize *me*," Mary said firmly.

"And I don't think anyone will me. We'll have to risk that, anyway."

"This is so much more than I either bargained for or deserved," Mary murmured as he put her into a taxi, "that I shall presently be advising all girls to pick up all men in all railway stations, and the national morals will go completely to the dogs!"

Much later, when they were walking back toward Fifth Avenue, under bright cold stars, she said in a suddenly serious tone:

"John, I don't know how to thank you for being so nice to me. I was down and out tonight. I have a job, I have enough money, I have a good home . . ."

"With noodles and potato soup and apple-strudel in it," he supplied as she paused.

"With all of those, and more too. But somehow it didn't seem to count tonight—all that I had. I wanted to feel young and popular and have an adventure! I went—I've often gone to the big station because everyone who comes and goes there is so thrilled, so busy. Meeting people, saying good-by; it's all so alive. I wanted to be alive too. And you've helped me, more than you'll ever know. I don't know who you are, but I know you were sorry for me and that you're kind—kind all through, and I—I do thank you!" Mary said, becoming a little confused and incoherent at the finish. "Now I'm going to take a taxi," she ended. "So it's good-night and good-by. Only—just one more thing.

"You'll think this all over," she said, "as I will. Men talking to unknown girls, girls talking to unknown men—that's adventure, isn't it? That's adventure since things are the way they are between men and women, and since we all think of these things as we do. If we—if you, I mean, because I think I know what I'll do—if you really should want to see me again, come to that same bench in the station at that same time any—what's today?—any Tuesday. Perhaps I won't be there, but I think I will. Perhaps you'll come, but somehow I'm afraid you won't. But if you do, let's keep up the incognito. I don't want you ever to know that I'm the sort of girl who picks up men——"

He had been standing facing her, looking down, for she was not very tall, and holding her small hand in his big gloved one. Now he said:

"Ah, forget that silliness! What does that matter? I may not be able to keep our appointment," he went on slowly, and again he saw, in the light of the street lamp, the quick color rise under her clear skin.

"It isn't an appointment!" she said quickly, proudly.

"Well, whatever it is, I may not be able to keep it," John recommenced painstakingly, "because I may have to leave town."

"I *quite* understand." He might better have slapped her, and he knew it.

"On the other hand," he said, trying to lessen the hurt, "I may be sitting there patiently in the Grand Central for the next fifty-two Tuesdays, watching the clock, and no Mary!"

"But anyway, a million thanks!" Her tone was cold: she was crushed. She pressed his hand, stepped into the theater current of Sixth Avenue, crossed under the roaring elevated train. He saw her signal a taxi, jump into it. She was gone.

"A man talking to an unknown girl—that's an adventure, all right," John said half aloud. "'Since things are as they are between men and women, and since we all think of these things as we do,'" he quoted her vibrant, eager voice. "'Mary,' eh? Well, perhaps I'd better keep away from the Grand Central for a while on Tuesday afternoons."

For the next Tuesday afternoon he deliberately made a business engagement in Hartford. He got back to town at eight o'clock and walked into the station waiting room. A girl in a blue dress was waiting on the bench he already described in his thoughts as "our bench," but she was not Mary—not in the least like Mary. John's heart, which had given an odd plunge of dismay, delight and excitement, settled again. He thought about Mary every day, and several times a day; there was a peculiar thrill and heartbeat to the thought of her, but on the second Tuesday John was in bed with a heavy cold, and as six o'clock came about he merely looked at the clock, wondered if she were there waiting for him in the station, tried to read, tried to work out a puzzle, flung his magazine away, looked at the clock again and picked up his book.

On the third Tuesday he was there before she was; walking up and down outside the row of benches, an unwonted agitation in his heart; expectation, fear, reluctance and hope all having their way with him. She would not come, of course; no girl in her senses, no girl with any pride—and Mary had lots of pride—would accept an affront such as he had given her, and forgive it.

But possibly, he thought suddenly, with an enormous sense of relief, possibly she had not been there for the two preceding Tuesdays, either. Perhaps she had been evading him as he had her. Mary. Mary. He said her name to himself and invested her with all the glory of the woman desired and lost.

In the end it was all very commonplace. She came in quickly and looked at the end of the long bench and, not seeing him, looked about, found him and came over to him with an outstretched hand and a smile. Just a nice girl, a working girl, in rather shabby but smart clothes; romance went out of the world for John, and everything was quite commonplace for a few minutes. But somehow, as they started off into Forty-second Street's traffic and crowds, his hand companionably steadying her arm, his voice at her ear where the hair curved under the blue hat, life came right again. Not sensationally, romantically, breath-takingly right; nothing like that. But it seemed good to have this girl Mary, and to be John, and to be together again. He had thought, in these three weeks, of many things he would like to say to her, and he had phrased them rather neatly to himself as he went through his quiet, rather solitary days, but the presence of the living girl was so vital, her answers, her reception of what he said so unexpected and so stimulating that John found himself being far more brilliant than his dream had been. He had to keep his eyes open to keep up with Mary!

They lingered over their dinner tonight until almost nine. Then Mary said that she was tired and didn't care for a movie. Could they talk a few minutes more and then separate? So they talked on for many more than a few minutes. Their oddly limited knowledge of each other only made the beginning of friendship the more absorbing; Mary could talk freely of her childhood in Glendale, in California; her father and brother still lived there, but her father had married again, and, while Mary liked her young stepmother, she had felt that she must break away and make her own life.

John told her in return of his little-boy days. He saw her smiling eyes film sympathetically when he spoke of the death of his mother, and had a moment of wondering exactly where all this was taking them, taking her and taking him. But Mary was a flashing conversationalist and she never let him stay on any one subject very long.

Always, under their talk, ran the thread of caution. Mary never betrayed herself. If John strayed close to revelations she would warn him lightly and quickly: "Look out—look out—don't tell me who your friends are at Oyster Bay!" It was at their fourth or fifth meeting that he told her that he was getting darned tired of it. Mary only laughed, unimpressed; she made no disclosures.

Then came the event that seemed like a miracle to them both. It was such a trifling thing; it was nothing at all really. Yet it filled them both with a happiness that was almost like awe.

It happened on a Saturday. Mary walked out of her way from the office to go through the station waiting room, and on the familiar bench sat John. That was all; yet that was breath-taking. It was one o'clock in the afternoon; they had had no appointment; they moved toward each other completely unaware that there was anyone else in the world; they linked hands; they smiled as if they never could stop smiling.

"How'd you know?" they asked each other. And on that day there was no question of what they wanted to do. They lunched at once, then they rode on a bus top out into the greenness of the spring, along the blue riverbank, and far down again through the arch into the park. And through the enchanted hours ran the additional enchantment, the knowledge that they had wanted each other at the same moment and had gone straight to the meeting place!

"I'd like to give you something in silver and enamel for your cigarettes, Mary," John said that day. "But I don't know what initials to put on it."

"Put 'Mary,'" she answered steadily; "then it'll mean twice as much as any other name."

"If I thought you'd surely give me another chance to see you, surely, surely, surely—cross your heart and hope to die—I'd tell you something. Cross your heart and hope to die if you don't meet me next Tuesday and I'll give you a hint."

"Cross my heart and hope to die," the girl agreed cheerfully. But she had turned a little pale. "Tell me now."

"Well—no, I'll not tell you now," John said with a sudden change of manner. "I'll tell you Tuesday night. That's—this is Saturday—that's only two nights, isn't it? What are we doing now? It's nearly five. What about dinner tonight?"

"I have to work tonight. Truly I do." Her fingers pressed his. She turned away, was instantly lost in the river of men and women that was pouring homeward at the close of the warm, languid day. John looked for a moment for the well-known hat; it was no use. If he ever lost her this way in the big city he never could find her again! Too many girls, too many blue hats, too many street turnings . . .

On the following Tuesday, when they met, an untimely dusk had shut down over the spring city; the sky was close and leaden, a sulphurous warm rain was falling in thick sheets. Mary's raincoat enclosed her in blue glass; her hair was curled up by the rain, her cheeks rosy and fresh, and she was breathless.

"I've been running through it!" she exclaimed, grasping his hands. "It's simply fearful! You'll have to come home with me and eat noodles and sausages; we can't go anywhere tonight!"

"You wouldn't take me home with you?" John asked.

"No, I couldn't," the girl said, her manner changing, her smile fading. "I forgot."

"Sometime you'll forget and then I'll really know you, Mary."

"But that wasn't the agreement!" she reminded him jealously.

"I know it wasn't. I'll play fair. I've a plan for tonight too. I've ordered dinner already, and after dinner we'll listen to the fight—don't forget we've got fifty cents on the fight—and at ten o'clock I'll turn you loose in the great city. Come along!"

In the taxi, for the few blocks drive, Mary was very gay; she seemed actually to enjoy the dark night and the roar and splash of the storm. But at the door of the apartment house she paused.

"Oh, now listen," she protested, a wet shabby glove touching his coat sleeve.

"Now listen, what?"

"I think we go no further, my lad!"

"Listen yourself, Mary. It's a horrible night to go anywhere, and my place is snug and comfortable, and there's a fire. Mrs O'Brien, who comes in twice a week to clean, is engaged to stay and sit sewing in the bedroom until you go home."

"Mrs O'Brien?" There was infinite reassurance in the mere name.

"Come up and see for yourself. She's a fine woman too; she's the one to speak her mind if anything didn't suit her."

"You mean you actually asked her to stay?"

"I mean that when I saw what pitchforks it was raining, at about four, I went out to the kitchen and asked her if she could come back. She said she'd get herself a cup of tea and stay right on; she wasn't anxious to get out into it. So then I asked Himashira to get us some dinner."

"I'll find out your name, John," Mary said, still hesitant, but getting into the elevator with him nonetheless.

"No, you won't, unless you want to. I explained to Mrs O'Brien that you didn't know it and were very specially anxious not to know it. I told her that if you asked her she was, of course, to tell you anything you wanted to know, but that otherwise she would please keep—in a word, keep her trap shut!"

He was so pleasantly, so easily sure of himself! Mary said in her heart that she had never known anyone like John—handsome, groomed, lean, brown, masterful. There was a little twitch to his fine firm mouth when he was what she called "running her," a something masterful and affectionate and amused at her feminine struggles to escape, that stirred the deeps of her being and made every fiber of her thrill. He was wearing this expression now. "Don't be afraid, Mary," he said. "I won't eat you!"

"You have no business doing this, you idiot," Mary said in her heart. But it was heavenly, too, on this furious wet night, to follow him into the big luxurious rooms and see the promised fire blazing, to meet the imposing, black-clad Mrs O'Brien, respectable enough to chaperon a dozen Marys, and to sit watching Himashira as he dexterously laid a little table for two beside the fire. "Of all situations in the entire world," she said aloud, "this is the one a girl finds the most—superlatively—satisfying!"

"Well, it seemed to me the obvious and sensible thing!" John was as pleased as she. By the time the cups of soup came on, and the brown birds and the green salad, they were talking together easily, unself-consciously, and yet with a definite sense, too, that their friendship had taken a decided stride forward tonight.

"Alas," said Mary when the clock struck half-past eight and John was

turning the dials to get the Philadelphia arena, "I can come to this doorway any time, now, and read your name."

"As a matter of fact you couldn't, for I have this apartment with a friend, and his name is the one downstairs. But you can have my name any time you want it, Mary."

"I don't want it, *please,*" she said hurriedly.

"You shan't know it then." They settled down into silence, listening to the fight. There was an interval of absorbed attention, and Mary said:

"It's a swell fight. I thought it might be a frame-up!"

"You're quite a fan, aren't you?"

"I like fights."

"You like everything I like, somehow."

" 'Then you must like yourself,' said the girl with a dimpled, provocative smile," Mary said smoothly.

"Delete that sort of thing," John answered in a lowered tone, not moving his eyes from the fire. "Somehow," he went on, "I think your name is Susan. It isn't, of course. It's probably a name I hate, like Marian. I somehow don't like Marian. It always sounds to me like a name the family picked because they didn't like real names like Margaret and Alice."

"Isn't it marvelous to be dining here in your enchanting apartment, and not to have the slightest idea who we are?" Mary asked. "We're reaching the end of the road, though," she added after a pause in which he merely glanced up at her, glanced away again and did not speak. "We can't keep this up. Let's—— I'll tell you what. Let's part tonight, and think this all over, and decide. And if we meet next Tuesday let's tell!"

"Next Tuesday is way off in the year 1984," John observed mildly. Mary laughed. "Suppose I were to ask you to marry me?" he added, almost as if involuntarily.

Things then began to go in a manner that Mary had not foreseen. She knew he had spoken almost against his will; she herself was suddenly quite at sea. She said unsteadily:

"I wouldn't advise that."

"Why not?"

"Because," Mary said, losing all bearings and entirely unable to think, "I rather think you're married already, aren't you?"

A silence, during which John, looking down at the fire, did not move. Presently he said quietly:

"What makes you think that?"

"You've—it seems to me you've indicated it in a thousand ways," Mary said stanchly.

"Suppose I told you that I was Richard Wilmartin," John suddenly began. In the silence they looked at each other.

"Richard—not *Dick* Wilmartin?"

"Richard Slocomb Wilmartin."

"Oh, you're not!" She was staring at him blankly. "Then you *are* married?" Mary said.

"Rather."

"But—but he has a mustache!"

"Had. You can shave off a mustache. I'm glad you know," the man said. "I haven't talked to anyone. I can talk to you. It's an awful mix-up, or at least it seems like one. But its simple enough when you understand."

"Your wife, then—I mean," Mary said, flushed and embarrassed, "Belle Pemberton. Weren't you and she supposed to be abroad?"

"I got back the day I met you. She's in France, with a dressmaker named Leon Le Gros."

"Oh no! Not after all—not after you'd——"

"You said that next Tuesday would have to end our affair or begin it all over again," he said after a pause. "Perhaps you're right. Perhaps we never should have begun it. You're the one that'll have to decide whether we go on or not. I can't. I began all this as a joke; it's no joke now. I was married to Cassy Hawes, certainly, and then I was married to Harriet Archibald, and then I met Belle Pemberton. Everyone knows what happened—Pemberton was treating her like a dirty dog. She used to go on in *Tears, Idle Tears* with a black eye powdered up, and tears on her face, night after night! Everyone knows I sent her a blanket of gardenias for every performance and every matinee to pull up over herself in that last act, and everyone knows that I was a complete fool about her. She's one eighth colored; I knew it—it didn't matter. She's that kind of a woman!

"Well, my wife was found murdered in her bed a year ago. She'd left me, but I had a key to the apartment; they found it on my key ring. You know—everyone knows—what went on. They tried to frame me; they couldn't. I hadn't a particularly sound alibi, but the district attorney hadn't anything to go on. It didn't worry me. I knew I hadn't done it, and I knew who had. The fools had the whole thing in their hands time and time again and they let it slip. She was in court some days—the papers thought it was because she wanted the publicity. Publicity nothing; anyone looking at her could have told you right then and there who was guilty!"

"She?"

"Pemberton. Belle Pemberton! Everyone still thinks I killed Harriet. Harriet was the sort of woman someone ought to kill. Rich—the steel people, you know—fat and soft and spoiled and flattered; no one ever got anywhere with Harriet except with flattery. She didn't know about anything else. She had one topic—herself. I divorced Cassy and married Harriet because she owned the handsomest yacht afloat. I'm boat crazy, and one day on Harriet's yacht fixed me. We were all at Biarritz—anyone who reads the papers knows that too. Harriet was seventeen and her income was two million a year. I hadn't a red. Well, I'm not so proud of that. But I didn't kill her. I walked out of that court as free as you are.

But of course it was all ended. My life, I mean. I'm not the sort that goes in for uplifts and charities, profits by my misfortunes! I was having a swell time; I'll never have it again. I'm done. But it was Belle who did the shooting—why, she used that very pistol with the silencer from *Tears, Idle Tears,* and took it back to the theater the next night!"

"Oh no!" Mary breathed, her eyes wide in a pale face. "How'd she get in? I don't remember it all very well, but wasn't a maid asleep in the dressing room, wasn't there a man on the hall downstairs, and an elevator boy? Wasn't it up somewhere on the nineteenth or twentieth floor; could anyone have walked in without being seen?"

"Harriet was murdered on Sunday—the day there's no show; remember that? That afternoon Belle Pemberton, with a black wig on—she's tawny blond, you know—went to the Park Avenue Ducal Arms where Harriet lived, and asked to look at the furnished apartment just above Harriet's. Oh, I know what I'm talking about!" John interrupted himself to say impatiently, as Mary made a little incredulous sound. "She told me this herself! While they were going through it she slipped the lock in the back door. She only stayed a few minutes, said it was too expensive for her, went down in the elevator, tipped the boy and walked quietly out into the street and in at the side entrance of the place. She climbed the stairs comfortably—all the servants were out on Sunday afternoon; no one to bother her. She went in the back door and locked it. Then she waited until evening, went down the fire escape, watched her time, shot poor Harriet and went upstairs again. After a while she went down the back stairs and out into the night and home. No one ever suspected anything! They had that elevator boy on the stand for five minutes; he didn't count! Agent, hallboy, starter, elevator boys—they got through with them in fifteen minutes for the lot. They were after *me!* Where had *I* been? Well, I'd lunched with Miss Pemberton, and then we'd walked in the park, and then I'd left her at her door and wandered about, dined alone—no witnesses. Every newspaper in the city by Monday night had me in the electric chair. Meanwhile Belle was playing *Tears, Idle Tears,* and everyone in the house was whispering that I'd killed my rich dull wife for an octoroon!"

Mary's face was very white.

"I'm sorry," she said simply. And then: "Would you have gone to the chair?"

"No, they had nothing on me. I wasn't afraid. But she was. She was scared to death. *Tears* got started on a fresh run, but she had a nervous breakdown and after the trial we went abroad and were married. Then I found she'd been in love with Le Croc for months. I left them there."

"But oughtn't you—after all, you've a boy eleven or so—oughtn't you clear it up for his sake?"

"He's with Cassy; she's a fine person. She'll take care of him and not let him take it too hard."

"What a story!" Mary said in a whisper.

"You're the first to hear it, the only one to know it. I never even told Yeats, my attorney. He said from the beginning that they couldn't get anywhere unless they could prove my having been there sometime that day, and all the men around the place knew me; they hadn't seen me for weeks."

"Just the same, you ought to be vindicated," Mary said warmly. "In the interests of justice . . . for the sake of the name of Wilmartin . . ."

"Oh, Lord, nothing'll ever save the name of Wilmartin now!"

"But how did you get out of the country?"

"Simple. I've a Canadian cousin who looks exactly like me. I sent for Roger and he came down. He grew a mustache; I cut mine off. When we got ready to spring it Roger announced that he was going to Palm Beach—that I was, rather! The photographers flocked down to the Penn Station, and meanwhile I went on board the Europa, second cabin, and got away."

"What a *story!*" the girl said again.

"Mr Wilmartin—on the phone, please," Mrs O'Brien said at this point from the doorway. "In the library, sir. . . . Oh, my goodness. I've given away your name!" she added in consternation.

"Never mind, Mrs O'Brien, it's all right now."

"And it's eleven o'clock now," Mary said, "and I've got to go."

"Wait until I come back," John said. Suddenly he looked very tired. "I'll see you to a taxi," he said.

But when he came back she was gone. Mrs O'Brien could only report that the young lady had not said a word but that she had "sort of snatched-like" at her hat and coat, and disappeared. John snatched a hat and coat, too, and also without a word went after her.

The rain had stopped. Moonlight shone in the wet street. He was in time to see her getting into a taxi at the corner.

Mary's taxi turned downtown; she got out of it before a big building in which several floors were blazing with lights in the night. She went up into a hot big room filled with desks and dangling green lamp shades and typewriters and smoke and shirt-sleeved men, and through it, and into a glass-doored corner office marked "City Editor."

"I got my story, Walt," Mary said to a man at the desk. His feet came down from the typewriter level, his cigar came down from his mouth. His grimy face paled.

"Says you," he said in an awed voice.

"Says me," said Mary.

Three days later John had a letter from her. It was an incoherent letter, and stained with tears.

"John darling, darling, darling," wrote Mary. "You know now what it was all about—that I tracked you, and trapped you, and was lying all the time! John dear, I'm in despair—I don't want to live. You'd forgive me if you knew that my heart is broken, that everything I've ever tried

to build up in myself is ruined, destroyed by me—myself. That I can never think of myself as a woman of honor again! My darling, I wrote their damnable story, and I wrote my resignation, too, and I took my check and tore it up before their eyes. Believe me, I begged them, begged them with tears not to print it; almost before I'd told Walter Nichols—on the city desk—what a scoop I'd bagged in the Wilmartin case, I was back there, begging him and Klein and Oliver for God's sake not to print it! Of course it was too late. They had the names, they had the facts, they were getting lawyers and the district attorney on the job then! And then, sitting at my desk—that same Tuesday night—I knew what I'd done! I knew that I loved you as no woman has ever loved a man before, that Cassy and Harriet and Belle didn't matter—that you were the breath of my life, were everything in the world to me! And I think that's why I did it, John. I think that under the excitement and pride of having landed the story was the feeling that I *could* do that for you—reinstate you with your friends, give you back something out of all the mess! But I'm not pleading for myself, except that somehow, somewhere, I must know that you've forgiven me. I don't mean that you could ever trust me again. We'll never see each other again. But someday I'll send you an address, and if you'll just wire 'It's all right, Mary,' I'll bless you to the longest day that I live! It isn't only losing you, my dearest, losing the right to comfort you for all the horror and the pain, but I've lost myself—the woman I respected and hoped such great things for!

"You see, I recognized you, John, that day in the station, and I'd been doing odd little columns for the *Gazette,* and they'd told me how badly they wanted the true Wilmartin story. It all came over me in a flash. 'If I can once meet him I'll get it!' I went back and told Walter Nichols that I had met you; he took me into Klein's office, and I had my little hour of being important! Last night—my God, was it only last night? I've not slept or eaten since—last night when you began to tell me, everything went out of my mind except my story. Newspaper people are like that. I said to myself it wasn't going to hurt you, and I'd gotten my story! I'd forgotten her and that you loved her—Belle, I mean.

"Darling, if I've ruined what was left of your privacy, I've ruined my own life too. I'm out of a job; you'll never find me. They haven't my address on the *Gazette;* we had to move a month ago because the old brown house was torn down; nobody knows where I am. You'll never know my name. I'm leaving town. Don't try to find me. I'm buried—I'm not going to see a newspaper or ever write a line for one again. But someday—for the sake of those Tuesdays that were happy days for you, too, and for the marvelous Saturday—forgive me."

"You write a swell letter, Mary," he said to her exactly eighty-one hours later. The girl in the library sprang up, facing him, her eyes wide. Her hand went to her heart, and the book she had been reading slid to the floor.

"Oh, John," she whispered. "Oh no—no!"

He had his arms about her. He was kissing her, and tumbling her hair, and holding her off, and kissing her again.

"Oh, John, how can you speak to me?"

"One swell letter," he said.

"You found me!" breathed Mary.

"Easily. Kiss me."

"John, but how!"

"You want that first? Well, you see, I'm a lonely sort of fellow, Mary, and everything you've ever said to me has made a mark. So when you gave me the slip—like a cheap French maid, by the way!—I realized that I had to find you or cut my throat, so I advertised in all the evening papers."

"But I haven't seen a paper! I came to my aunt here in the country—I've been gardening, and crying, and taking walks, I've been almost mad. I never saw any advertisement!"

"I didn't think you would. At least I took a chance you wouldn't. But you'd told me of your Germans in the boardinghouse; Tante and the doctor and the dog, Snyder. My personal said 'Tante, send me five dollars to Box Such-and-such, emergency, love to you, Doctor and Snyder." And I signed it 'Liebchen.' Remember that you told me they called you that, and that they read every line of the evening papers?"

"Yes, but they knew I'd come to my aunt in Bound Brook!"

"I chanced it they'd think you wanted the money and were up to something contraband, and—God bless their German hearts!—the next day there it was, registered and with a return address of course. I went straight up to Eightieth Street, and that was just two hours ago!"

Mary's head was on his shoulder; her arm was about him, and his arms both about her.

"Oh, this is heaven! You've forgiven me!" she breathed. "John, will they try her? Poor thing, I've let her in for it."

"Belle, you mean? No, they'll not bother her."

"Oh, say it, John, whether you believe it or not! If you knew what I've been going through! *Say* it."

"It's true. You see, I followed you down to the *Gazette* that night, Mary, because I knew—all along."

The scarlet color blazed in her face; there was never anything as lovely as Mary's color, coming up under the creamy skin.

"No, not all along," he corrected it. "It was really only toward the end that something—something sophisticated and smart about you made me wonder. Dick's had an awful lot of publicity, you know, and I've caught the overflow. We——"

"But *you're* Dick Wilmartin!"

"I'm not. I'm his country cousin, from Ottawa. Make a note of Ottawa, because we're going there twice a year. The minute I thought you were spoofing me, Mary, I thought of spoofing *you*. It made me a little

sick to think you'd do it, and yet I couldn't blame any girl who had a chance to get a good story out of Dick. After all, he's had his fun with the ladies too! So I laid a trap, and I told Mrs O'Brien to come and call me at about eleven, and if you hadn't given me the slip I'd have told you right then. I was going to say, 'Don't hurry back to the newspaper, Mary. This is all fiction! For all I know, Dick *did* shoot his wife, perhaps with Belle's pistol. Or perhaps he got someone else to do it. Anyway, he's been acquitted, and she's tied up with her new man, and he's at large somewhere in France and probably getting married and divorced daily.'

"I was going to say all that, but you'd gone, and then I knew the fat *was* in the fire! I tore down to the street and luckily saw you. Remember it had been raining, and there weren't so many cabs about. But I got one and followed you, and I went in and had a talk with Nichols and what's-his-name, the city editor. I knew they couldn't rush the story—there are too many details to check—so I waited until you came downstairs, with your face red, crying, and then I went up. I squashed the whole thing. For all I know, there wasn't any empty apartment in that building. It was all fiction, I tell you! All made up!"

"Why, John, you *liar!*" Mary said simply, drawing his arm tighter about her.

"You should call me that! You, a spy, a deceiver, a girl who sold love for pelf!"

"We never can marry now. Think what we could call each other when we fight!"

"On the other hand, no one else can marry us, Mary. We can't let some fine man, some good woman, in on our secret."

Mary's eyes came up in sudden alarm.

"You're not married?" she asked.

"To the present, the past definite, the pluperfect, no," said John. "To the future, the subjunctive, yes."

"Let's—here, this is my uncle's chair, it's a marvelous chair, sit down, John," said Mary. "Let's get on to some other verb!"

SINNERS

From *Baker's Dozen*

"We have to keep it kind of warm in here because of their not getting any exercise—they get chilly," the matron explained.

"Don't they get out?"

"Not this weather. And they sort of lose interest. . . ."

The matron glanced at the visitor, and the latter, a big, quiet-eyed woman in a once handsome, dowdy coat, looked back at her dubiously.

"They haven't got much ambition left when they get *here!*" the matron said with a laugh.

The other frowned faintly, as if in vague pain. She followed in silence through the big clean impersonal halls that smelled of coffee, disinfectants, air heaters and herded, over-clothed humanity.

"I didn't get your name?"

"Huggett. Mrs Joe Huggett."

"And you're some kin to Lucas Rippey?"

"Some . . . ? Oh no. Just a friend." Mrs Huggett cleared her throat; her large, full, serious face had turned a little pale.

Some of the poor forlorn old men were reading shabby magazines in the winter heat of the assembly room; a radio was playing. Many of the occupants of the big apartment were merely staring idly into space—broken in mind, the visitor saw, as well as body. The warm air was thicker here, with the smell of clothing and bodies and food.

Lucas Rippey was a thin, blue-eyed old man, with white, thin hair. He rose alertly, looked surprisedly at his visitor. When the matron had led them to a little side parlor and left them alone, he told Mrs Huggett smilingly that he could not remember the time he had had a caller before. His bright blue eyes twinkled at her delightedly.

"But I've only be'n here two years, and ain't settled down yet!" he confessed. "I worked, up to then. I got flu in the year 'twas so prevalent; the' warned me pneumonia'd foller. And sure 'nough, it did!"

"Take a good look at me, Lucas," Mrs Huggett said heavily. She had seated herself, thrown back her widow's veil. "Don't you remember me?"

He looked at her keenly, still smiling.

"No'm. I'm sorry. But your face don't say nothing to me."

"I was Emma Kent," she said slowly.

The old man sat down himself now, suddenly, with an air of shock, and returned her steady, unsmiling stare. The light had died out of his eyes.

"Is *that* who ye are . . ." he said in a whisper.

There was a pause. Then the woman began:

"I've been hunting you for years."

"That so?" he asked, still in a dulled voice.

"Ever since I was thirteen years old," she resumed after another empty pause, "ever since I was thirteen years old—and that's all of forty years ago—I've been sorry."

A softer look came into the wintry, bright old blue eyes opposite her. Lucas Rippey began to shake his head regretfully, deprecatingly.

"I lied about you," the woman said flatly.

He cleared his throat and spoke without resentment.

"I've often wondered why ye did that," he admitted mildly.

"I don't know what got into me," the visitor said in a stony, quiet voice. "I don't know what does get into a girl, sometimes."

She paused, and he looked at her with respectful sympathy.

"I was running with Sue Clute . . ." she began again.

"Well, there!" he said, his face suddenly brightening as he seized upon the diversion. "I hadn't thought of them Clutes for forty years!"

"Sue had her picture in the paper, an' that was gall and wormwood to me," Emma Huggett pursued, resolutely, unhappily. "She was terrible pretty. I was just et up with jealousy, I guess."

He was considering it, his old head on one side, lips pursed and eyes narrowed.

"I never thought of that. I used to think you dremp' all you said," he murmured thoughtfully.

"No, I didn't dream it," the woman answered promptly. "I made it all up. I was dyin' to be important, to get noticed by somebody, like Sue had. The night Kane Madison was murdered I begun romancin' to my mother and gran'mother, an' the more they made of it, the smarter I thought I was. I don't know what in creation started me. But once I'd started, seems I couldn't stop."

"It's hard for us to explain our own acks, sometimes," Lucas said politely, in a pause.

"Hard?" she echoed in a tone that was itself hard. "Well, I've been tryin' to explain mine for forty years!" A shadow fell upon her plain good face. "You were in prison?" she asked reluctantly.

"Sixteen years."

"Oh, my God," Emma said in a lifeless whisper. "State's prison?" she added.

"State's prison."

"Was it awful, Lucas?"

"Yes, at first it was," he admitted, his eyes fixed on space as he remembered. "I wa'n't much more than a kid, and some of them men wasn't fit companions for man or beast. I was sickly too: I'd be'n raised in the Bayliss County Orphans' Home, you know."

"I didn't know that!" she said, stricken. After a moment she added, "One minute, the last thing I was thinkin' of was you. The next, I was tellin' Ma and Gran'ma this long rigamarole about how I seen you

up by the Madison place runnin', and how you was buryin' something up near the birch grove in Holley's Woods. . . ."

"I never was anywheres near the Madison house that day," the old man offered as she paused. His blue eyes were fixed upon her with a sort of innocent, dispassionate expectancy. It was almost as if she were entertaining him with a story.

"You told 'em that in court," she nodded. For the first time anguish came into her voice. "Oh, why, why, why," she began, knotting her big, capable, work-worn hands together, "why didn't they believe you, instead of takin' the word of a crazy girl of thirteen! Mind you," she went on suddenly, "after that first crazy Easter afternoon, when I'd told my mother this yarn, I lay awake all night, and I made up my mind that I'd come out with the truth the next day, and tell them I'd been lying.

"But I couldn't get my courage up for it at breakfast, and at school, in recess, I kinder began to let it out to the other girls that I knew something about Kane Madison's murder. It was just too easy.

"Walkin' home from school, I remember, the wickedness of what I was doin' suddenly come over me, and I spoke right out loud, while I was goin' by Bassetts Pond. 'This has got to stop!' I says, as loud as that.

"But then when I got home Judge Robbins was there—the old judge himself, that us kids were all so scared of. And he held out his hand to me, gentle and friendly, and he says, 'Come here, Emma. You're only a little girl,' he says, 'and you don't understand the sinfulness of the world. Now,' he says, 'I want you should promise me that you'll not say any more about poor Kane Madison and the Rippey boy. Will you do that?' he says.

"Well, a great relief come over me, and I felt like I was saved. It never occurred to me that he was holdin' me as an important witness. I thought my share of the whole thing was over, and when the *Telegram* sent a feller out to get my picture the next day I was just as happy as I thought I'd be, gettin' my name into the paper. Judge Robbins had told me not to say nothin' more about anything, and yet I was gettin' all the excitement of bein' pointed out and talked about."

"You never seen me near the Madison house the day Kane was killed," old Rippey said definitely, after a pause, "becuz I wa'n't there."

"No, I never saw you at all that day," she agreed dully, the hard, shamed color in her face. "As a matter of fact I was up in our attic all afternoon, dressin' up and playin' lady."

"Huh!" he commented, thinking. The woman looked at him appealingly.

"I used to pray," she began suddenly. "I used to go down on my knees and pray that somebody would come out and prove that I was lyin'. But I couldn't do it myself!"

"I guess they'd have convicted me anyway," he suggested briefly.

"I don't know how they could."

"I was kind of a loafer," he remembered. "I was the kind of feller hard-workin' men like to git into jail."

Mrs Huggett sat looking at him heavily, dumbly. She sighed.

"I started life a charge on the state," the man said. "I didn't git out of the orphanage until I was fourteen. At twenty-two I was back on the state again for sixteen years. When I come out I was quite delicate, and the' sent me to Colorado. . . . Well, I worked some, there. But the state was payin' my rent, just the same. And now—here I am, back on 'em for life this time, unless all signs fail!"

Her alert eyes had brightened with sudden resolute interest.

"This time," she said, "I can get you out if you want to get out."

"How do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"Well . . . " She looked about the clean, ugly, disinfectant-scented room, her shrug indicated the clean, ugly, disinfectant-scented institution behind it. "Do you *like* it here?" she asked simply, in surprise.

His old face flushed painfully.

"No ma'am. Nobody could like it here," he answered firmly. "My pride—you may smile to hear me talk of pride——"

"I wasn't smilin'," Emma said, blinking and swallowing.

"The state's generosity I deeply appreciate," old Lucas Rippey said with his favorite forlorn attempt at literary flourish. "But I've by no means made up my mind to remain. I ain't sixty-four yet."

Emma Huggett was silent for a thoughtful moment, considering, with a faintly knitted brow and bitten underlip.

"I have a real nice ranch, down in the Santa Clara Valley," she began suddenly. "My husband got it from his folks. I have fruit and chickens . . . barns . . . everything."

"I guess that's down Linden Creek way?" he hazarded.

"That's in California," Mrs Huggett said briefly.

He widened his amazed bright blue eyes; he was pleased.

"Well, for pity's sakes!" he ejaculated. "That's always be'n a great word with me," he confessed. " 'California.' It has a real pretty sound. I've always thought I should like to see California."

"I hope you will," the woman said ineloquently. There was a pause.

"Ain't it some considerable distance away?" Lucas Rippey asked respectfully.

"It's well over twelve hundred miles by rail," she said.

"You be'n visiting back here?" he pursued, puzzled.

"No, I come to find you."

This left him speechless. He smiled his polite, appreciative smile.

"For forty years I've been sayin' this to you," Emma Huggett presently began in a determined voice. "I don't know as I ever imagined I would find you in a state home, or that we'd both be so well along in years. But I knew that somewhere, sooner or later, I'd be saying it.

"You spent sixteen years in prison for a crime you didn't commit,

and it was my fault," she summarized it. "I don't know, Lucas, that anything in the world can make it up to you," she added, and there was a wistful softening in her heavy face as she looked at him.

"I guess I didn't 'mount to much, anyways," he said gallantly.

"That's neither here nor there; that don't lessen what I done," she persisted, tossing her head impatiently, as if she tossed his mollifying suggestion from her.

"Well, I always say I've had more time than most men for readin'," Lucas said cheerfully. "I'm a great hand for a book. Adventures—I seem to share 'em with the authors!"

"I'm well fixed," the woman said, not listening.

"And you live in California?"

"I was tellin' you. I've got a ranch—chickens and fruit—outside a place called Santa Clara."

He looked from the high institution window at barren fields level under January's snows.

"You don't have no snow there?"

"My alfalfa was three inches up this New Year's Day."

"For pity's sakes!"

"I had a big room fixed, off the kitchen, for my father," Mrs Huggett presently observed. "He had sciatica, and he couldn't climb stairs. I have a radio down there, and a Victrola, and an airtight. He was real comfortable there. I've got an old car you could drive. . . .

"I'd do for you," she said humbly, thickly, her voice trembling, and her big bare hands beginning to tremble too. "I'd do for you just as I done for Father. There's lots you'd like to do about the place. There's a Portuguese girl helps me with dishes and cleaning, but I'm one to run my own kitchen, and I'd like to have someone to cook for again."

"I don't know as I understand what you're drivin' at," Lucas said, clearing his throat.

"It isn't in any way making up to you," she persisted stubbornly.

"Why," he said kindly, pityingly, "what you done you done as a little girl. I wouldn't hold that against you! Nobody wouldn't. You seen a good chance to show off . . . children'll do that. . . . That ain't nothing. . . ."

"I never thought, if I ever did find you, that you'd kill me, saying that," she observed as he paused. "I'll get you your ticket, I'll make all arrangements, and I'll meet you at San José station," she added.

Silence—a different sort of silence—deepened between them. The tears had come into her eyes, with the difficult words; tears stood in his bright old blue eyes as he answered her.

"Why, I don't hardly suppose you're asking me to leave the state home, Emma?" he faltered.

She made an awkward gesture, laughed thickly and briefly, frowned again.

"Well! You take me completely by surprise. . . ." said Lucas. "Well! This is surely unexpected. . . ."

"It's the one thing in this world that I want to do."

"Getting out, huh?" he mused. And there were already wings in his voice. He glanced out at the snow again; a radiator clanked in the warm, stuffy stillness. "I'd be glad to get out," he whispered, suddenly shaken. "This is a hard place to be . . . for a proud man." His voice thickened; he was still.

"I wouldn't be no burden to you!" he assured her, recovering.

"I wouldn't care if you were."

"Well, I wouldn't be. I could do a good deal of cartin', in that car—I can drive any make there is," he said eagerly. "And there's nothing I don't know about chickens. Hosses—I haven't had so much dealing with them. But chickens—there's money in them. And I ain't a sick man, you know. I've always be'n a worker, only it was winter comin' on, and myself well along in years, and they being apprehensive that I'd take another chest cold."

"You won't get any colds in Santa Clara."

"California!" he said, rapt. "Well, I declare, I didn't know when I got up this morning—it shows how little trust we put in Providence—seems we never know what's coming!"

She sat heavily silent, watching him anxiously.

"I take this very kindly of you, Emma," he presently said, considering.

"It's like a dream to me that I've found you, Lucas, and you aren't dead, and I can maybe make up the hundredth part of what I done to you!"

"We ain't responsible for what we do as children."

"No, but we can pay for it, Lucas. I've been paying for forty years."

"Sho!" he said, distressed.

"If they'd sent you to the chair, then I would have spoke!" she burst out miserably. "There wasn't ever any doubt in my mind about that! But there were extenuating circumstances, and you was only tried for manslaughter. And meanwhile, they were all making a fuss about me—reporters and court—everyone. I kept trying, after I saw how terrible a lie I'd told—I kept trying to cut it down, and they'd praise me for that too.

"My folks moved away, but I made a girl back home promise she'd let me know what happened to you. But she never wrote me. And after that I tried to put you out of my mind and to forget the whole thing.

"But I couldn't. It rode me day and night. It come between me and everything right and sweet about my marriage and my children. There wasn't one of 'em born but I didn't look down at his little face and say to myself, 'I wonder if some hysterical girl of thirteen is going to swear *your* good name and your future away!'

"You spent sixteen years in jail for a crime you didn't commit. But I've been forty years in hell, Lucas. I used to pray that the Lord would make it up to you and punish me. But I never had the courage to come

out and confess. No living soul ever knew what you and I know. I was afraid."

"I don't know but what I've had the best of it, Emma. I haven't ever be'n much of a success," the man said. "But I don't know's I've ever be'n afraid, either. You mustn't feel too bad."

"I want you to come and live in comfort and independence on my place," she said. "If I'm ever to have another moment of peace, it'll be due to you. It's been burning in my soul for ten years that that was my way out."

"Well, you certainly are a good woman," he said slowly, in a silence.

"I'm not a good woman at all. I'm the murderer, not you. I hardly knew you, and I did to you what a savage wouldn't do to his worst enemy. There's no happiness I could give you that'd clear *me,* I know that. But if putterin' about the farm, and feelin' that you were a free man, with something put by in the bank, in case I was suddenly took . . .

"If that'd mean anything to you, Lucas, late as it is now to make amends, why, it'd be a charity to me to let me do it!"

He blinked with wet, smiling eyes. But he spoke sturdily.

"If it'd mean anything! Why, Emma, I don't know as folks realize just what this kind of a place is like, eatin' amongst a lot of paupers and beggars and fellers that aren't mentally straight. If I ask for a shirt or a sweater or a pair of pants, she unlocks the wardrobe and hands me out the first one she sees. I don't blame her, she's not got any reason to respec' me—but I haven't stopped respectin' myself, just the same. I don't know as you appreciate just how hard it is. . . ."

He stopped, smiling, with a circle of bright, hard red color in each of his withered cheeks.

"A man likes a little peace and privacy," he explained simply.

"I'm alone now," the woman said in a short pause during which they looked at each other. "My husband was a good man, but he was hard. He died awhile back; my boy died in the flu year. The other little feller died when he wasn't but four, and my girl married a missionary and lives in China. But I'm well fixed. I'm not complainin'.

"Only, there hasn't be'n a day of my life I haven't thought of you. I don't know that there's be'n an hour when I haven't remembered that hot Easter Sunday, back home, when Kane Madison was murdered, and when I, a smug little girl of thirteen, with long curls, stood up and lied away your life!"

"You wasn't nothin' but a kid, Emma."

"I knew better'n that, though."

"I certainly," he said in a silence, "I certainly would enjoy livin' on a farm again. I'm country bred, and trees and fields seem to say something to me. Thoreau—a lady gave me a book by him. There was a man that had the secret of livin', Emma. Did you ever read his books?"

She was looking at him wistfully; there was something of humble entreaty, something of admiration, in her dull look.

"No, I never did, Lucas."

"Well, you'd enjoy 'em immensely," he said.

"There's just one thing more to say," she began abruptly, after a pause "I want you to understand that the obligation in this matter isn't on your side. It seems to me you've already done more for me, Lucas, than I'm ever goin' to be able to do for you!"

Six weeks later she walked to the barn, on a hot March morning, to tell him that lunch was ready. Supper was never anything but warmed-over biscuits and tea and fruit sauce and such nursery fare, but luncheon was a daily triumph for Emma, who was a master hand with chicken tapioca gravy and asparagus omelette.

The air was blue and singing this morning, and all about the white farmhouse the lilacs were in flower. The yard was pleasantly littered with ropes and planks and odds and ends; a bridal wreath had burst like a popcorn ball under the low window of Lucas' kitchen chamber, and up the slope of the hillside plum trees were white masses of bloom against a celestial sky.

The barn stood in a slight depression too shallow to be called a canyon; mighty oaks were scattered among the shabby old buildings; the windmill was flanked by towering, tasseled eucalyptus trees. A calf was blatting somewhere out of sight; chickens were talking and picking near the line of whitewashed farm buildings.

Lucas was sitting on a backless chair, mending something with a neat leather thong. The spring sunlight fell graciously upon his comfortable, relaxed old figure, in its muddy corduroys and thick sweater; he was whistling to himself as he worked, the Airedale attentive and adoring at his knee.

"If you aren't whitewashin' something, you're mendin' it!" Emma commented with an air of dryness.

"That Portygee broke his milkin' stool strap," Lucas explained.

"You're a great hand for jobs," she said, smiling in honest affection.

His delight in the little farm had made her see it with new eyes. Tom Huggett had been a sufficiently satisfied rancher, but there had been no romance in his attitude. Lucas, a broken old jailbird from the poorhouse, saw enchantment everywhere. One morning he was busily whitewashing, another hammering; on a third he drove the car into town and came back laden with chains, tools, seeds. The place seemed to gain an entity, a personal fascination, under his eager care.

Since Tom's death she had tossed her weekly copy of *Farm and Orchard* unopened upon a heap on the desk in the unused dining room. Lucas had fed upon these hungrily, had drawn her into discussions of pruning and hen houses. He wanted to try a hive, one of these days; he had theories about acacia honey. He was already "Uncle Luke" to the Portuguese who worked intermittently on the place; to half the village; Carolina, the kitchen maid, adored him.

He was happy, and Emma Huggett, watching him wistfully, as he expanded in this new atmosphere of comfort and liberty, felt in her own sore heart a certain satisfaction that was somewhat like happiness too. The old car was a very Cinderella coach to him; he worked over it, tinkered with it, kept it shining. His own books and lamp, his coffee cup with the pink roses on it, the instant allegiance of the dog, these were things in which he took untiring delight.

"Lunchtime?" he said when she had inspected the one-legged milking stool.

"If you're going to be a real farmer, Lucas, you ought to call it dinner."

"Well, that's right too." He walked along beside her through opened gates and corrals. "This feels more like June than March!" he said. And then suddenly, "Say, listen—listen. I've got a bone to pick with you! What's all this about?"

He drew from his pocket an envelope, a typewritten letter, a small, neat brown book.

Her heavy, sad face brightened only a shade.

"Oh yes!" she said. "Yesterday was the first. I put some money—fifty dollars—to your account."

"I don't need money!" he protested. "I've got some of that check you sent the superintendent. I haven't no more use for money here than Captain has!"

The dog leaped at the kindly old hand that dropped to his silky head.

"I'd pay a foreman more'n that, Lucas."

"Why, but sho!" he said. "I eat my weight in butter and eggs every day. . . ."

"You don't eat much," she said quietly in the pause.

"It'll just accumulate there at the bank," he said stubbornly.

"It's a good place for it."

"I want to tell you something that may make you feel good, Emma," the man said suddenly. "I've kinder wanted to say it for some time; I may's well say it now. I'd live the life I've lived all over again, to have it come out like it has now."

"There isn't any money in the bank that could buy your sayin' that," she said simply after a space.

"We don't know what governs our destinies," he went on. "What I'd have be'n without them long years of incarceration, who can say? I was destined to endure 'em, and you destined to eat your heart out with regret. But we don't know but what all's for the best. . . ." He stopped, innocently pleased with his own oratory.

She sighed deeply, frowned.

"You've got a sweeter nature than I have, Lucas."

"It don't take a very sweet nature to appreciate having health and liberty and some work to do," he suggested.

"Remorse is the thing that ages you and eats into your night's rest," the woman presently observed in her own heavy, hopeless way. "You

might well forgive and forget, because you're innocent. But I keep going over and over it. Ma and Gran'ma were in the kitchen when I got home that Easter afternoon, and I'll never forget Ma's holding out the paper to me. 'See about Susan Clute, and her folks sendin' her East for violin lessons?' she says. Sue'd always had everything I wanted.

"It kinda made me sick, the rest of that afternoon. I changed my dress and bathed my face and took a good long drink of water out at the pump, I remember, but I was just shaking inside.

"About six o'clock Mrs Tenney came running over, and she told Ma about Kane Madison being murdered. 'I'd like to know where Lucas Rippey was this afternoon,' she says in a scared sort of whisper, 'because everyone knows he and Kane were both after Thelma Cass.'

"Then I spoke up. Right out of a clear sky I says, 'Why, I saw Lucas Rippey up near the Madison place this afternoon!' I says. The minute I said it I knew I was done for. They both turned to me.

" 'Then you know where poor Kane was found?' Mrs Tenney says.

" 'It must have been somewhere near the house,' I says at random, not knowing whether she'd know I was lying then and there and say that the body was down near the railroad tracks or something. But no, she just looked scareder than ever, and she says, 'Yes. He was lying right across the doorsill.'

"After that I went on. As different neighbors came in I'd tell it all fresh. And when Judge Robbins come, the next day, I was as easy as an old shoe with the details about how you spoke to me, and how you were buryin' something and asked me not to say I'd seen you. . . .

"I was crazy, that's the only explanation."

They had halted in the shadow of the barn at the dooryard fence. The lilac blossoms near them moved in a soft breath of wind and were still. The spring sun shone down warmly upon the white-painted house and the new green of the high elms and maples. Larks went singing up from the grass in the green fields.

"I thought we was goin' to forget all this, Emma."

She laughed a brief, troubled laugh with a note of shame and gratitude in it.

"Yes, that's the sensible thing to do."

"I don't know as it matters much what you do with your life, long's you end it right," Lucas said thoughtfully.

"I know. But as if there wasn't trouble enough in the world, to send an innocent man to prison! Lucas," she added abruptly, in a quickened voice, "who *did* kill Kane Madison?"

"I don't know. We had a fight at the livery stable, all right, him and me," the old man said, "like it was proved in court. We fought over Thelma—she'd gotten into trouble, and he was sorter laughin' at me about it. I don't know when I've got so mad—all of a sudden.

"But that wa'n't all the score betwixt Kane Madison and me. Ever since I'd be'n a little feller in grade school he'd been bullyin' me. He used

to twist my wrists. Sometimes my wrists would be sore for weeks, but I never dast to tell anybody. I hated him, all right; I *would* have killed him fast enough!

"This afternoon he come into Lenhart's stable while I was tendin' it for Len Lenhart, and he begun to ask me if I would like a message from Thelma. I wasn't never a regular beau of Thelma's, but she seemed awful sweet and pretty to me, and I couldn't bear to think of her bein' in trouble.

"He backed me up to the loft ladder, and he begun forcin' me up, and I struck at him with the broom handle—like they brought out in court—and I yelled at him that I'd kill him, all right. The lady in the cottage next door told all that true enough, and that I run out after him. . . .

"He run across the fields towards home. But I never followed him. I went up into the woods and laid down on the grass, all afternoon, hatin' him.

"But then who *did* kill him, Lucas?"

"Mysteries of the missin'!" he said cheerfully. "I always thought Millie done it, for all her carryin' on an' her widow's veil. It's a plot, all right!" He admitted himself that he was "great" on mystery stories. But then, Emma would muse a little enviously, he was "great" on everything. She was well past her half-century mark, but she had never met anyone like Lucas before, unless an occasional vital enthusiastic child were like him.

Everything delighted him, every waking, every breakfast, every hour of his busy puttering day was a separate delight. He discussed the chickens as if they had been human entities; the old plow horses came over to the corral fence and rested their great shaggy heads there when Lucas was busy in the farmyard; the Airedale crushed his hairy length against Lucas' porch door at night and whined and muttered from time to time in a very ecstasy of love.

Miss Farmer ran out of the library with a new detective story for "Uncle Luke." Doc Brainerd, the veterinary, came out to the ranch and conferred with him. Thin little overworked Mrs Pointer from the next farm told Emma that the children were different creatures since Uncle Luke had begun to give 'em lifts in his car, and the very minister himself, ending a call, said warmly, "You've got the secret, Mr Rippey. I'm a young man, sir, I've got a lot to learn. You do me good."

It was only upon the famishing Emma that the healing dews did not fall.

"I see you as a little feller in the orphanage, Lucas. Missin' your mother, probably, wonderin' if you was ever goin' to have folks and a home of your own. And I see you gettin' out, a skinny little feller of fourteen, workin' for Smiley, the undertaker. What'd that old skinflint pay ye, anyway?"

"Fourteen a month."

"Good grief! Whatever did you pay at Mrs Mason's for your room, then?"

"I paid her a dollar sixty a week. Her boy Silvester was in the same room."

"And you got your own meals?"

"Picked 'em up where I could. I used to go over to the station restaurant lots, and help 'em wash dishes."

"Silvester Mason wa'n't any too good company for you."

"No, he was a real demoralizin' influence, I always thought."

She would regard the sunshiny old thoughtful face wistfully, painfully.

"Nothin' hasn't ever embittered you, Lucas."

"No," he would agree, considering. "Don't know's it has."

"But wa'n't you thunderstruck when I, the minister's niece, come out with all that rigamarole?"

"Yes, I was, as I recall it. I was real surprised."

"It was my evidence that done it, Lucas."

"Emma, can't you forgive and forget?"

And Emma would laugh in desperation, seeing the sympathetic look upon his kindly, rosy old face.

"I tell you there's many a millionaire of sixty-five that'd change places with me!" he assured her over and over again.

One very hot July noon he and she were alone, in burning summer silence, on the shabby, shadowy side porch. The night would bring coolness, indeed, would bring actual chilliness again, but it was hard, at the moment, to believe in anything but dry, parching, relentless heat.

The sky was whitish blue, the fig tree shadows seemed to pulsate with a green light. In the orderly dooryard pepper plumes hung motionless, filling the air with pungent scent; long strips of cream and russet bark fringed the towering trunks of the eucalyptus. Chickens were fluffing and complaining in the shadow of the stable lane; the windmill wheel was lifeless. Now and then the dog sighed, moaned faintly in his sleep.

Walled on three sides by the house and comfortably fenced on the open north side by heavy grapevines, the side porch was the coolest place on the ranch. It was mellowed by half a century of plain, busy living; its floor sloped a little, its unpainted woodwork was satiny from the touch of fingers. A shabby screen door connected it with the kitchen; a shabby single step with the packed hard earth of the yard.

Emma, always restlessly active, was stringing beans with quick, expert movements of knife and fingers. Her big hard hand would fill with the finished green strips, she would open her fingers to release them into a saucepan beside her. Her thick black hair was brushed back, crisp and wet; her full throat rose from a thin old cotton gown she called her "voyle."

Lucas was tinkering patiently with a yellow-jacket trap, bending the wire gauze carefully, whistling under his breath. He was in his shirt sleeves; sweat stood on his childlike old forehead, his thin silvery hair was plastered down with it.

He glanced at his companion now and then; stopped whistling.

"Heat's given ye kinder a headache, has it, Emma?"

She raised heavy eyes.

"No, I don't know as my head aches," she said slowly.

He worked on again in silence, and again gave her an uneasy look.

"Emma," he said suddenly. "There's something I want to say to you."

She glanced up expectantly; his tone was odd. Her hands were still.

"I've had this on my mind for some time," Lucas began again. His old face had reddened painfully. He hesitated, looking at her doubtfully. "This may make kind of a difference," he said and stopped.

"Whatever on earth are you talkin' about, Lucas?"

"You've be'n very kind to me," the old man resumed, forcing himself on. "And it's only right you should know."

"Know *what?*" she asked, nervous and impatient.

"Emma," he said, "would it surprise ye to know that I done it?"

She looked at him blankly, heavily, not in the least understanding.

"I mean—that you was right about Kane Madison," Lucas said.

The burning, difficult color of middle age spread to her own face now. Her eyes not leaving his, she automatically put aside her panful of beans and raised her fingers to press her throat.

"Yes sir, I done it," Lucas then stated flatly, in an expressionless voice.

"You . . ." she stammered, and swallowed with a dry throat. "You—why, Lucas Rippey," she added sharply, regaining her senses, "you don't know what you're sayin'!"

"Yes, I do, Emma," he persisted simply.

For a long moment she watched him steadily, almost fearfully, her breath coming quick and shallow.

"You wasn't anywheres near the Madison place!" Emma whispered at last.

"Becuz Kane Madison wa'n't killed at his own place. He was killed at Lenhart's barn, and he run all the way home."

Her eyes flashed as she considered this.

"'Twa'n't possible," she breathed, still watching him as if fascinated.

"That's the way it was, though, Emma."

"Oh, my God, my God, my God," she murmured, looking away. Her hand was clutching her heart now. Her lids had half sunk over glazed eyes, her breast moved painfully.

"I hit him with a pipe in Lenhart's," Lucas resumed. "He backed me up the ladder; he was ta'ntin' me about Thelma. I useter go kinder crazy whenever anyone ta'nted me like that. I useter go crazy even before I left the orphanage. The matron knew it. 'Don't get Lucas into a tantrum,' she useter say."

"Lucas, you never killed Kane Madison!"

"I say I did."

"You hit him on the head——"

"Down at Lenhart's, that Sunday afternoon. He run out the side door

and went streakin' up through the medder. I run after him for a piece, yellin' at him that he couldn't talk to me that way, that I'd kill him. Then I come back, and I was scared. I knelt down and prayed, right there in the middle of the stable, that he wouldn't die."

"But the mallet, Lucas? The mallet they found in the Madison kitchen, that had blood on it?"

"Well, maybe it was ackshally used to hammer a steak with, like old Gran'ma Madison said. Anyway, I knew I'd hurt him considerable. There was blood on the pipe, all right.

"I got up from my knees scared to death, and I says, out loud, 'I've got to get out of here! I've got to get away,' I says. And then it sort of come to me that no, better hang around and act innocent. So I went out and washed the gas pipe at the troft and threw it down in the sun on the dry grass."

"Your sleeves was wet when they come took you!" she whispered, struck.

"Yes, from washin' the pipe. I washed my hands good, too, and then I prayed some more. My mother had be'n a great believer, and I says, 'I'll believe, too, if You get me out of this!'

"Well, I've come to believe!" he ended, with his wintry, sunny old smile. "But I had a long way to go before I found God."

"Lucas," the woman said, and her own voice was like a prayer. "Do you tell me you killed Kane Madison?"

"Emma, if it meant goin' back to the town farm, I'd have to tell ye——"

"Oh, let that go!" she exclaimed, suffocating. "Just tell me—tell me that you done it——"

"I do tell you I done it!"

"You killed him, only he got home before he fell?"

"He run across the medder, Emma, holdin' onto his head."

"They never thought of that!" she said, thinking aloud, remembering.

"They never thought of that."

"Then my lie," she began, trembling, ending a short silence, "my lie wa'n't all a lie, Lucas?"

"No. I got"—he cleared his throat—"I got what was comin' to me!" he admitted.

"Oh no," she muttered, shaking her head, covering her face with her hands and swaying to and fro. "No, it wasn't right. It wasn't right to give a little feller of twenty-two a life term, no matter what he done! And you from the orphanage, too, and delicate—like we all knew you were.

"But, oh—my—God, Lucas," she gasped, looking up. "I'm so grateful to you for havin' told me! I'm so *grateful* to you! I'm grateful to God!"

Her hands were over her face again.

"My God, I thank Thee!" he heard her say. "I thank Thee!"

When she sat down in her chair, arms dangling limply at her sides,

eyes fixed on the hot white sky beyond the grapevines, she was panting, and he saw that her cheeks were wet.

"Don't mind me, Lucas," she said in an infinitely exhausted and gentle voice, with an unsteady smile. "Them's tears of joy. I'm happy. I don't know as I've been so happy since that Easter Day."

"It's be'n on my mind to tell ye."

"And I thank you, Lucas. You never did a kinder thing in your life."

"I wanted ye to know."

"Mind you," she said with sudden vigor, "it don't lessen my wickedness in lyin' about ye! No, it don't do away with that. But at least I didn't send an innocent boy to sixteen years in hell and ruin his life."

"You must of knew, Emma."

"No, I didn't, Lucas. I told them lies out of whole cloth!"

A long silence, hot and still all over the burning world that was beginning to smell of dusty apples and Isabella grapes.

Emma was breathing like a spent runner, sweat stood on her temples.

"The relief of it, Lucas!"

"It's goin' to make you feel different to me, Emma, that's what I'm kinder afraid of."

She had closed her eyes, her head flung back. Now she opened them. A smile—it was to him a new type of smile—on that sad, heavy face, suddenly brightened it. She did not speak, but she extended a brown, hard hand, and his fingers caught hers.

"You don't feel—hard, toward me, Emma?"

"Hard?" she echoed with trembling lips. "Lucas," she said, "I'm never goin' to feel hard again toward *nobody!*"

"I'm a criminal," he reminded her simply.

"Yes, but you paid. Whilst I . . ." she was beginning. "But no, I've paid too," she amended it under her breath. "God knows I've paid too! We both done wrong, Lucas. But through the infinite goodness of God we've found each other and forgiven each other, and that's all there is to it. You've done more for me this afternoon than I could do for you if I made you the King of England!"

Blinking, swallowing, her hands still shaking, she began to gather up her pans.

"Well, there, I haven't felt like this in dear knows when!" she said, laughing and crying at once. "I'm goin' in to wash my face and hands and brush my hair and get my bearin's. It seems to me like a new world, and I shouldn't wonder if 'twas a pretty good one, like you're always tellin' me."

The screen door banged behind her lightly; he heard the clink of the pans in the kitchen, and then her heavy step mounting the inside stairs.

Lucas sat on, on the shady side porch, tinkering with his trap, smelling the pleasant summer smells of dry tarweed and yarrow, wet, sprinkled roadside dust and ripening grapes. He began to whistle softly again as

he worked. Once he spoke to the drowsing dog, who immediately rose, whimpered affectionately and pawed at the brown corduroy knee.

The old man smiled. He looked away, through a pattern of grape leaves, at the eternal hills, transparent and delicate today as opal-colored gauze. They seemed as light, as floating as the cloudless sky itself.

There was peace, there was content, there might even have been a trace of wise and subtle humor in his eyes.

MASTERPIECE

From *Baker's Dozen*

He hesitated a little, reaching the drawing room; there was a fire beyond there in the soft gloom, twilight, the top of a polished long table, the rounded backs of hospitably circled chairs. But where was Isabel?

Suddenly, immediately, in one of her old characteristic, laughing rushes, she had come out of shadows, she had hold of him. Her hands, in the old way, vital upon his, her old effect of being taller than she really was—of being, indeed, only a tall girl in her childhood. Nothing was changed.

"Peter!" she said in the old voice.

"My dear, dear girl!" he said, touched, shaken. And quite simply, as old friends in the forties may do nowadays, they kissed.

Then they went over to the fire, and she put him in a big chair and sank into one near, and opposite, so that they could stare delightedly at each other. They were, blessedly, alone at the moment, but there were five or six empty teacups waiting on the tray. Peter Penrhyn had a distinct appreciation that this hour was a precious one, in a short lifetime, and that moments were valuable.

But he sat smiling, unhurried, fingers linked, gray eyes under a copper-burned and graying forehead, keen, savoring every word, as befitted a man who had been globe-trotting, exploring, hunting, fighting animals in jungles, and ice on mountaintops for twenty years. A man who had not talked to Isabel Yarrington for twelve—fifteen—good Lord, except for that unsatisfactory cup of tea once, five years ago, it was eighteen of them!

"Isabel, what luck to find you alone!"

"You certainly didn't think I was going to have the neighbors in when you came?"

"My dear, you've such wonderful neighbors now—with everyone interesting in the world only asking to be your neighbor!"

"I see," she said with the old, deliciously rebuking smile—she had been playing mother to everybody since she was six—"I see you think I've become a fine lady since last we met!"

"Nothing in the world could have made you a fine lady since we met," Peter said with a little flush under his copper skin, and a little bow.

She narrowed the fine eyes into laughter.

"Oh, thank you! Somebody has made a polished flatterer of you, at any rate," she returned. "Is it perhaps Paris?"

And she indicated the tall, muffled windows behind her, where an opal September sunset was indeed lighting the gray roofs of the French capital.

"Begin with Paris," Peter directed her hungrily. "Anything will do—let's get started! Why are you in Paris just now?"

"Because Timothy likes Paris, always has," she answered. "Not quite satisfied anywhere, he does have his pleased moments here. Because, in the last ten years, it's been New York, Hawaii, Paris again, Deanery Street, Taormina, France, Brittany that time, Amherst—our boy did a few months work there—Russia, China, San Francisco, Paris again!"

He smiled, musing and shaking his head.

"It's been phenomenal, hasn't it, Isabel?"

"Timothy's success?" she interpreted quickly. "Oh, extraordinary. It isn't only the books; let us suppose, for the sake of family modesty, that he isn't Shakespeare over again," she smiled; "but it's the prices, Peter. Thousands—thousands! For movie rights, for serial rights, for second serial rights. It's a day of enormous magazine circulations, a day of big prices. A critic here and there may scorn him, but Timothy says—and truly, perhaps—that most critics are disappointed and unsuccessful writers. The machine goes on."

"Glorious beyond all the old dreams!" Peter marveled.

The woman, with a swift little shake of her head, rebuked him.

"As if anything could touch the old dreams!"

"Ah, you're quite right—you're quite right, Isabel," Peter agreed. "What dreams they were! When you were cooking Timothy's dinners in the Washington Square rooms, when we used to sing and go off on Sunday walks in Staten Island——"

"With nothing but red apples in our pockets! And the day you rigged me up a water jar on the fire escape, to save ice!"

"You've not forgotten that! And the essay the *Atlantic* took. Isabel, I've wondered sometimes, all these years, what *you've* been doing? All the world knows about Tim. What about you?" Peter broke off to ask. "What happened to the essays—the poems? After all, it was *you* who were going to be the writer, who had the start, indeed! I remember some of us didn't think it much of a match for you," he reminded her, smiling, "to marry Timothy Yarrington, a newspaperman merely on 'space and detail.'"

"Fancy!" she said in a sort of amused, awed whisper. "Not much of a match—Timothy Yarrington!"

"Ah well, after *The Skyrocket*, of course, after *Drums Up the Street*—that was different!" the man conceded. "Everyone rejoiced then, everyone said that your faith in him was justified. But you'd been married four years then."

"Yes, but I had Don, the baby. I was busy. I've always," she said cheerfully, "been busy. A man like Tim, exacting, restless, demanding constant change, and a boy like Don . . ."

She stopped on a note of laughter at her own pride.

"Is he so fine?" the man asked with a little twinge of something like jealousy.

"Donny?" Her eyes shone. "You'll see him; he's here now—he'll be in with Tim directly. Tim said that he'd give you and me half an hour or so to weep upon each other's shoulders, but he'll be in before you go."

"Tim doesn't sound as jealous as he used to be, Isabel. There was a time when men didn't have tea with you alone, my dear."

"Ah, but one grows more sensible!" she said with her old, happy flush. "Besides, it's the boy now—it's Donny. If he could be jealous it would be of Don nowadays. His pride in the boy, his talent, his future, his plans for him—that's his world. Don's everything to Tim. I don't know, I don't know," Isabel Yarrington said in a lowered tone, a tone in which he was astonished and strangely sorry to detect a note of pain, "what Tim would do if Don ever disappointed him!"

"Your boy is—seventeen?"

"Nineteen, and as tall as Dad."

"And will he be a writer?"

"Don!" Her astonishment was almost funny. "But you know," she began and interrupted herself. "Of course you *don't* know," she corrected it, smiling, "that Don's a genius. No, this isn't mother talk; there's been many an hour, Peter, when his mother has wished that he wasn't! The life of a genius isn't all roses, and a genius isn't an easy little boy to bring up properly."

"Writing already, eh?"

"Oh, not writing! *Painting!* Painting ever since he could hold a brush in his fat little fist. Screaming, Peter, even when he was little enough to walk, holding tight to my fingers, screaming that the horses' legs all went in slanting lines together. 'See, Mummy, all in scribbly lines!' And when he got home he would do it, on his slate, flying hoofs and manes in the wind. There!"

Glancing about for proof, she saw beside the fireplace the framed pencil sketch of a woman's head, severe line of cheek, sweep of cock's feather, ruche of rich fur.

"He didn't do that? Of you, eh?"

"Ah, but indeed he did. In twenty minutes, at that."

"Remembering your struggles for recognition, my struggles, Tim's years of floundering before he found himself, one feels like saying, 'How very simple!'" Peter commented dryly.

"Not so simple," she assured him with a smile. "For Timothy isn't simple by any means, and Don is so extraordinarily simple that there is no anticipating him and no classifying him. He has always been a solitary child, of course, dragged—due to this success of Tim's—all over the world, as the children of professional men usually are. He is serene, friendly, sufficient unto himself, he has three or four languages, he has his gift—and he likes to live in a Breton farmhouse, playing with the neighbors' children and painting the sea! Simplicity is a problem in itself, Peter."

"Nothing marketable yet?" Peter surmised.

"Not yet. Although Berét, in whose classes Don began to work last year, has taken him into his own studio. When Don goes into the classes they say a group forms around him. He's really as artless as a child about it. But you'll see him in a few minutes, you'll see for yourself."

"And all this has kept your own pen idle, Isabel?" the man asked sadly.

"Yes." Her answering nod was a little sad too. "Sometimes, when my men are off together, it makes me feel a little—lonely, Peter," she admitted. "Only the other day—oddly enough, for I had no idea then that you would be coming back to ask about it—only the other day I began at last my short story. You remember that I was always about to write a startling short story?"

"The 'Masterpiece,' we used to call that fabulous short story of yours!"

"Exactly, the 'Masterpiece.' Well, a few days, perhaps a week ago, I began it—a society story. I got paper, my best pen, settled myself after luncheon to write it. I have really—and Tim says it's all one needs—a plot. And if I can write this story," Isabel said, laughing at him with eyes that were suddenly filled with tears, "all the years of waiting won't seem wasted to me!"

"I suppose another life almost always feeds a life like Tim's," Peter said, deeply interested, in a thoughtful tone.

"Ah, but don't make me a martyr! I've had back a thousand times anything I've sacrificed," she warned him sturdily.

"You can't have had, Isabel!" he said, faintly impatient. "Genius like yours—for it *was* genius! A beginning like yours, for everyone who matters was talking about young Mrs Yarrington's stuff. And now for twenty years packing trunks and answering letters . . . !"

"There's nothing like the loyalty of an old friend, Peter," the woman smiled.

"Now," he went on inexorably, "when we're none of us young, when he's sated himself on glory, he tells you that all you need is a plot!"

"I don't think you ever were quite fair to Tim," she commented judicially. "And I know that you were always far too generous to me. What more—what more could I have? Money, travel, interviewers, reporters, photographers, movie men everywhere we go, fairly haunting . . ."

"Timothy!" he supplied grimly as she paused.

"The best suites, the best servants and food and rooms, the best clothes," she continued.

"Clothes!" Peter echoed. "No, Isabel," he added with a philosophic shrug. "It's been a full life, an interesting life. But of course it hasn't been *yours*."

"No," she agreed in a low tone as he paused. "Perhaps it hasn't. Perhaps it hasn't. But never mind, Peter," she broke off to say cheerfully, "I shall really get at my story this week—my masterpiece! And I shall take it as a good omen that you are here, by chance, to play godfather! And

you'll see, it's going to be wonderful. Tim has promised me a whole free afternoon when I am to read it to him—consult him about it!"

"In the old days," he reminded her good-naturedly, "it was not Tim who gave you ideas. You brimmed with them. You gave them—rivers of them, to him!"

It was dusk in the room. Servants were bringing in the tea. The woman leaned back in her chair, almost as if she were glad to hide her face, as several lamps bloomed softly all at once about her. Peter did not look at her.

Presently he heard her speak in quick, fluent French to a servant, who went out.

"I've just asked him to send Germaine in," she explained. "My little foster daughter. She goes back to Brittany in a few days."

He glanced at her, surprised. She had drawn her breath with a sharp stab, as if she drew a sword out of her heart.

"I didn't know that there *was* such a person," he said.

"No? Well, naturally not. But I lost a baby daughter in Brittany, ten —twelve years ago, and Germaine has been like a daughter ever since. She's seventeen now. Very shy, absolutely what she seems to be, the daughter of a fisherman and his sweet, sad, girlish little wife. Drowned, both of them, and Germaine was Don's playmate, without a relative in the world. So she came to us. She's been at school in Brittany, been with us in Italy and here; she's an unusual child. You know we've spent the last six summers in Brittany."

"And to whom does she go back?"

"To school; to the nuns." Isabel's face revealed nothing, her voice was quiet, but there was sympathy in the man's voice as he asked curiously:

"You'll miss her?"

"Ah-h-h!" She admitted it, sighing sharply. "We've had such a happy summer—so many happy summers, all playing about together, sharing soup and apples on the shore, moonlights and early mornings. Sometimes Tim works there, and sometimes he goes off for visits, to Nice or to London. Ah, here she is!" she broke off, with welcome in her voice.

She half turned, over the back of her chair, and a girl came quickly into the lamplight. A slender girl, not tall, built with a hint of boyish spareness and squareness. A very young girl—seventeen. Curly, rich, rebellious dark hair coiled in a knot on the fresh young neck, wide-set, black-lashed eyes, cheeks healthily white, healthily touched with rose and powdered with golden freckles across the short, straight nose. The mouth crimson, wide, the teeth big and white, the manner just a hint unfriendly, suspicious, truculent.

"Germaine—a dear old friend. Monsieur Penrhyn," Isabel said, her fine, long, white fingers clinging to the girl's square, brown, childish ones. "You're coming in for tea, my little daughter?" she asked in French.

"I think not, Tante," pleaded the other in a tone at once affectionate, shy and stubborn. She flung Peter a glance, and Peter, puzzled, thought it strange that any girl who was under Isabel's wing should wear so obviously troubled a look.

"She's glorious!" he said when she was gone. "A splendid, golden, honest, glorious little—animal!"

"No, but do you think so, Peter?" Isabel said eagerly. "Oh, I'm so glad you do! Everyone does," she added; "not that one gets her—quite at once. She's too utterly real for that. Germaine has no manner except her own simpleness. But when she loves . . . !" She had murmured the last sentence as if half to herself; now she fell silent, perhaps pondering it.

She had not been a particularly handsome young woman, he mused, but Isabel Yarrington was wonderful now. That was the word for her, wonderful. In every way the years had refined her, polished her, who had always been one of the finest of women. Her plain gown, with its medieval touch of deep lace at the throat, her crown of dull, tawny hair, her chiseled mouth, the quick appraising glance of her clear, almond-shaped gray eyes, the cadences of her voice, the easy, yet carefully restricted range of her conversation, all helped to make her extraordinary, fascinating, mysterious; in a word, *wonderful*. He would never fall in love with Isabel again; he was forty-six now, and she only a year or two younger. But suddenly it seemed good to him that she was alive, here, in Paris, enriching and making interesting every phase of life that she touched. It seemed good to find himself still in the very inner circle of her valued friends, able to pick up, at a moment's notice, the relationship that had been so sweet for a while, so unendurably hard for a while, and that now was to be all sweet, all good, again.

It was with a quickened sense of the value, the beauty of life that he rose, a moment later, to greet her husband and son.

Timothy! And part of Timothy's phenomenal insolence, where life was concerned, was that he never changed. He prided himself upon not changing. At fifty-two he was what he had been at thirty-two—opinionated, conceited, eager, fascinating, magnetic. He was easily witty, easily epigrammatical; for forty of those fifty-two aggressive and successful years he had been the center of every group in which he found himself.

Handsome, of course. Handsomer than ever now, with the thick smooth black hair cut sensationally by a bar of pure white. What hair but Timothy Yarrington's ever would age so picturesquely? Pale, his big-featured face ascetically lean, his big figure just romantically stooped, fur on his overcoat collar, an inch more width than was conventional on his hat-brim, a big seal ring on his fine hand. And the unchanged voice, the eager, affectionate greeting, the immediate reversion to what had supposedly been interesting him immensely.

"I can't get over it! The doctor sketches this poor fellow's lung on his

chest in red—by Jove, I thought the brute was using a red pen! 'Dead?' I asked him. 'Not yet, sir,' says one of the nurses, just as you'd say 'Two lumps'! 'Pas encore, m'sieu'! Oh, my Gawd!" Peter remembered the marvelous laugh.

That was Timothy. Years and friendships were nothing to him. He found his supporting company wherever he happened to be, and played his dozen leading roles a day, and asked no more of life.

"Where on earth *were* you?" Isabel's lovely hands were busy with the tea things.

The boy, who had kissed his mother and flung himself silently into a chair, spoke for the first time. A man's voice.

"I had a bit of anatomy to do. Dad and I went into the emergency hospital; they told me I could look at any number of 'em. A lad there asked us if we'd like to take a peek into the surgery."

" 'Pas encore, m'sieu,' says the lady politely," Timothy repeated with the deep chest laugh again. "My *Lord* . . ." He frowned, plunged deep in thought.

Peter remembered Timothy's trick of falling into a study when there was company about. The writer, taken by a bit of local color unawares. The depicter of naked human souls, piercing through the commonplaces of a filthy, red-spattered workshop for human bodies, caught by it, unable to forget it.

How magnificent he was! How he gloried, gloated, in being himself! He was stirring his tea, flinging careless questions at Peter, making them all laugh, even the gloomy boy, charming them all once more.

Peter studied the boy. He was remarkable; broad, curly-headed, rosy, square-shouldered, with big, keen, delicately fingered hands. He was hirsute, like a French peasant boy, his lip shadowed, his ears, nostrils, the backs of his hands frothed with fine curly hair. His eyebrows were formidable, his dark eyes quiet and indifferent, like a child's eyes, his mouth and jaw large. Young Donald wore his loose clothing comfortably, indifferently; it was obvious that he did not brush his hair, he merely combed its tight rings. And Peter knew that he saw before him one of the souls that fate marks before birth with a golden star. For good or ill, this was no boy. This was merely the vehicle for the dazzled brain, the trembling, dedicated hands through which Art should be born.

He would eat, drink, sleep, exercise those legs, perhaps beget children, travel, love and hate—but he was Art's child, through poverty and longing, through striving and failing and succeeding, as this contented, ebullient, super-successful father of his quite as positively was not.

Isabel's baffled genius and the maddeningly marketable success of Isabel's husband had produced this creature, to sit there between them like a kangaroo between two puzzled, plodding ponies, Peter thought whimsically, a kangaroo who knew nothing but how to leap.

Donald having had his tea and departed, the three elders fell into a con-

versation that was to Peter like the pages of a book turning backward, so completely did he grasp now what Isabel's problem was.

Yet Isabel hardly spoke. She sat watching the men, smiling at them with her deep, almond-shaped gray eyes, quite transparently happy in the pleasant hour.

Timothy spoke incessantly. There was nothing overbearing or insistent in his talk, it was just his old gay, irrelevant chatter, one rapid-fire observation hitching itself to another, everything impromptu, careless, born of itself. He was observant, witty, he had an astonishing command of words; Peter observed that Isabel guided him, sometimes with her wide, amused smile of approval, sometimes with just a hint of contraction in her brow, just a hint of pursing at the corner of her mouth.

The old phrases were there: "Of course, I don't know a damn' thing about writing. . . . One of you fellers will have to interpret this damn' thing for me, Peter. . . . By God, I wished, when I saw it, that I could write it! I wished my stuff wasn't such damn' piffle!" Timothy ruffled the black hair with the effective white band on it in the old troubled, youthful fashion.

Yet he had never been youthful, Peter remembered, and would never be grown. He created his own atmosphere, and it would always be the atmosphere of precocity, a child's pompous interpretation of maturity sitting him as oddly as did the middle-age assumption of boyishness and vigor. Perhaps all men were that at heart, or the majority of them, anyway; perhaps that was life, the bloom forced and the fruit denied. That, it might be, was the real secret of Timothy's great success.

"Isabel tell you that she's picked her pen up again?" the writer asked after a while. Peter merely moved his smiling eyes to where she sat, with a faint nod for his affirmative. "She could have been doing it all these years," Timothy assured him. "Lord knows why she ever stopped. Anyway, now she's beginning again, for we'll be anchored here for a year —until June, anyway, if the boy goes on with his classes."

"I've been waiting a long time for Isabel's 'Masterpiece,' " Peter told her smilingly.

"It may be dreadful," she pleaded, flushed and amused at such serious consideration. "At all events, I think I have a plot—'titanic,' she added, laughing, "as Timothy sometimes says! And in a day or two I shall have it in shape enough to read it."

"And then you've got to be here, Peter," Timothy suggested suddenly. "Come on now—you and I. We went over her old essays in the Washington Square apartment, do you remember? She didn't ask us for advice then; we sat at her feet—where," he said in sudden and quite genuine feeling, "one of us sits still!"

"Both of us," Peter amended, liking his host better at this moment than he had done today, remembering affectionately how simple old Tim was after all, how easily touched, for all his joy and satisfaction in himself. He *was* handsome, successful, a faithful husband, a devoted

father, a hard, straight-ahead worker—and that was much. It was even pleasant to feel that in a life so well rounded, with two unusual men in husband and son, Isabel might sometimes be glad to find room for a third, a companion with whom to wander some of the old streets of Paris, loiter at a picture show or in a tearoom. He had gathered from Timothy's talk that there was small loitering in his busy day. Chairs and tables were reserved for Timothy now, meetings were arranged, every expedition was important, formal, by mere virtue of having Timothy Yarrington in it at all. Winter might be nice in Paris, Peter mused, content, with Timothy and Isabel in one's life again.

The talk took a definitely hospitable tone when the clock struck seven and mellow church bells, in the neighborhood somewhere, confirmed it. He could go home and dress, but he must dine with them this first night; there would be other guests; no matter, Peter was "family" now.

"Don?" asked Don's father.

"I think he'll have a bite earlier. He loves to walk in these autumn evenings," his mother apologized. "Not a drawing-room exhibit exactly!" she explained to Peter.

"Gerry?" asked the writer.

"Germaine—no. She has a bad headache. She dreads the going back to school, poor youngster," Isabel again interpreted, to Peter. And as they separated she asked, smiling and flushing, "Will you really come and hear my story?"

"If you wouldn't rather"—Timothy was out of hearing—"rather read it just to Tim?" he said.

"No," she said hurriedly, half smiling, half troubled. "If you'll come it'll make it *sure*. Say you will; be sure to tell him so tonight. Otherwise he may put it off and put it off! It's not important really, and he is always busy. But if you make a little occasion of it . . ."

He glanced at Timothy, big, triumphant, humming softly as he shook out the evening paper, enthroned in luxury and lamplight, and glanced back at his wife, slender, quivering, beautiful, the exquisite harp of a thousand chords.

"Of course," he said briefly. " 'Make an occasion of it,' indeed! To hear the author I've been waiting to hear from for twenty years read her 'Masterpiece'! What do you think *is* an occasion!"

So Peter came to the big gray "hotel" again, and again was sent upstairs by the old concierge, and again found himself in Isabel's lovely drawing room; this time with rain gathering and streaming, and gathering and streaming, down the tall, high, gray windows. All Paris smoked under the first rains, the streets gave back steel reflections, and the little steamers that threaded the gray rivers seemed dissolving in falling water, moving water, enveloping water.

It was the day of days for this sort of thing, Timothy said in satisfaction. He was alone beside a good fire, poking the bed of solid, glow-

ing coals occasionally with the steel prod, smoking contentedly, a prisoner, he said, of the weather, and of one of his easy colds. Curse this half-and-half season anyway, he added good-humoredly.

"And where's the prima donna?"

"Oh, waiting for an entrance, Peter! The stage all has to be set for this performance," Timothy growled indulgently. "She has been as fussy as a high-school girl about it. Wouldn't have the boy in—the little girl went back yesterday, by the way. No, this is a first night for Isabel, all right."

"Now *stop,*" said Isabel herself, coming in with her hands full of papers. She slightly changed the position of a big round comfortable velvet armchair, glanced, with a whimsical smile at the men that admitted her own absurdity, at the dull, quiet afternoon light that was entering the window, lighted a standing lamp on a wrought-iron standard and finally seated herself, with a triumphant rustle of settling, like a busy little girl.

The cone of light encircled her beautiful head, with its crown of thick tawny hair, and sent deep shadows under her almond eyes. Peter thought no mouth in the world ever showed the restraints, the character, the humor and charm, that Isabel's finely chiseled mouth expressed.

She was wearing some sort of loose embroidered gown; Rumanian, she explained when Peter admired it. It was dove gray, gold, black; it fell about her slender body squarely, in stiff angles, like a priest's robe; there was one immense clear emerald on her white hand.

"Isabel, you're lovelier than ever!"

"That's usual in this generation," she conceded, smiling. "Now this manuscript isn't really ready to be discussed," she began with a delightful catch of sheer shyness in her voice. "The most important part, the big scene," Isabel confessed, "I haven't quite finished. But what I want is your ideas—your verdict whether I have a story here or whether I haven't. Sometimes it seems to me tremendous and sometimes just—*bosh.* It's a society study——"

"Oh, Isabel, for heaven's sake!" her husband interrupted, amused and affectionate and impatient. "Get started! Cut out these airs! Did you ever see anything like it, Peter?"

"Well, my characters," she was beginning, when he interrupted her again.

"Go *on!*"

"I will, I will!" she agreed hurriedly. "But I really have to explain a little, Tim, because Peter was brought up in the Far West, and he doesn't know our home atmosphere. This is written of one of America's oldest and proudest New England families, Peter. Aunt Hannah, Timothy," she added with a glance full of significance.

"Oh no!" Timothy ejaculated simply.

"Rigidly theological, without ever having had a faint flash of true Christianity," Isabel resumed, "critical, proud—proud as Lucifer, Peter

—cold, narrow, putting the family tree first and even their own terrible and revengeful God a little bit behind it, moribund, rotting, one of those families that has lost all sight of the plain things that began them, the big families, the expansion into a new country, the handling of pioneer problems, the very things that made them great! Old portraits, old dead silver, old rooms full of old, old furniture, old servants——"

"Old letters, hates and feuds, old offices full of rotting documents," Timothy added with a shudder. "That's one reason," he said to Peter, "that we live abroad. My cousin Jenny—br-r-r!"

"You'll recognize her," Isabel said, delighted with his feeling. "I've set my scene there, in a proud, dark, decaying old family," she went on. "Rich as Croesus, useless, and stupidly set in the ways of righteousness. And I've brought new wine into my old bottles——"

Her husband was interested now, already proud.

"What sort of new wine?" he asked.

"You'll see! The wine of youth," she answered. And while the rain lisped and dripped at the high, opaque window, and the coke fire burned, and the clock ticked and tocked steadily, she began to read.

As she read, Peter, listening with his elbow on the arm of his chair and his cheek resting on his palm, felt himself taken away across the salty north Atlantic into one of those staidly established old American towns that are by their very nature older than anything Europe will ever know. Settled only two hundred years, by cold and granite inhabitants, they seem to be a part of their own mountains, of their own flinty soil. Dark rooms, cold in winter, shaded and gloomy on the most burning summer day, polished floors, polished silver, traditions, heritages, judgments.

Isabel called her family the "Judsons," and the very name came almost instantly to Peter to express their adamant pride and reserve. Their woolen mill. Their wealth. Their heavy, quiet meals in a heavy, quiet dining room. Their bachelors. Their spinsters. Their solid, impregnable rectitude.

Old Madam Judson, sixty, steel eyed, lace shawled, silent. Sarah and Caroline, unmarried at forty-three and -five. George, Cyrus and William, all unwed. Henry, eighteen years dead, and Henry's little girl, Ellen, eighteen years old and motherless since babyhood. Finally Henry Cyrus, father of the family, spade bearded, righteous, sixty-five.

Books, talk of reviews. Talk of national politics, of ancestors, of women's clubs. Talk of bridge, of golf, of the new factory. All talk merging into the silence that itself seemed something tangible in that old house.

Little Ellen with gold hair and shy brown eyes saying, "Yes, Aunt Sally. No, Uncle Billy." Little Ellen going daily with her grandmother and aunts for a drive with young Dick Sloane, the chauffeur, at the wheel of the big car.

And suddenly for little Ellen—love. Dick Sloane's murmuring voice, warm and trembling, in her ear; Dick's hand, hard and young, over her

soft little aristocratic hand; Dick's hot kisses, frightening her, awakening her. Dick's arms——

"My God," Timothy Yarrington whispered at this point. "You make me sick. You make me sick. They're going to crush her?"

Isabel paused, her eyes bright with unshed tears, her cheeks red with excitement.

"That's my story," she said, breathing a little hard with sheer pleasure and pride at the look she saw in the men's eyes. "Life comes at last, after so many barren years, to the Judson's. The girl's body is perfect, the boy's is perfect. Perfect love, in the sweet, soft summertime, brings them together, and they find each other! But the Judsons, for all the elaborate frame they have built for life, for all their treasuring of its mementoes," Isabel, looking off the manuscript now, ruffling the pages with a nervous hand as she spoke, went on, "the Judsons won't have it! The girl is a Judson, the boy is a nobody. They must be parted; young and palpitating with their glorious first passion, they must be torn apart by the dry old empty hands of the Judsons——"

"By God, Isabel, you have a story there!" Timothy said in a sort of breathless admiration, when she paused. "That's a story, dear—if you can develop it. Fish-eyed, flat-chested old maids, but they can put their narrow old Congress gaiters down on *that*, fast enough!"

"In the story they have her up for one of those family court-martials," Isabel proceeded. "You remember them, Tim?"

"How they love them!" he said bitterly. "A blubbering kid contradicting himself, getting in deeper and deeper. 'Let him speak, Jenny. Let him explain this himself!'"

He shuddered, and Isabel looked back at her written pages.

"It is decided to dismiss the chauffeur," she resumed. "And to take the little girl, Ellen, around the world with Grandma and Aunt Sarah."

"Good!" interpolated Timothy with acid relish. "Show her the Pyramids. Good!"

"The child stands stricken and silent," Isabel continued. "She has always been biddable—always obeyed. She listens, agrees, she has very little to say. Trunks are brought upstairs, and the man, Dick Sloane, sent ignominiously away. There is even a cold letter of recommendation written by Miss Carrie for Dick, so that all appearances shall be in order."

"Good touch!" Timothy said again, grinning appreciatively.

But the story, Isabel said, wasn't finished. More than love had found little Ellen out, it appeared. To the chill, stark consternation of all who loved her, there was worse. The child was no longer a child. The delicate little body was the chalice, now, of more than Ellen's life.

Peter had known that Isabel was a born writer. But in the few iron sentences in which she described the attitude of the Judson family he saw more than a mere piece of stupendous writing. It was the cruel, Christless religion of minds poisoned by jealousy, by wordly pride, by

fear, by anger, by deep-rooted and quite unconscious limitations and stupidities, laid bare here before him.

"Is it as bad as that?" he asked when she paused. Isabel looked questioningly at her husband.

"Isn't it, Tim?"

Timothy Yarrington had his affectations, as none knew better than Peter. But he was not acting now. He was restlessly pacing the hearth-rug, his hands sunk in the pockets of his velvet coat, his leonine head a little fallen forward, his brow dark.

"Yes, it *is* as bad as that!" he conceded. "The boy banished, the minister, the little girl convulsed with tears, disgraced, heartbroken! The aunts going about, opening and closing doors—everything kept from the servants, of course. Gloom. Gloom. The house full of horror because something *real* has happened in it! Yes, you've a story there, Isabel. How do you end it? They run away. They always do, God bless 'em! Thanks to them, there isn't an old family that hasn't its scandal!"

"No, I don't have them run away," Isabel said, turning back to her papers once more, her eyes sparkling. "They may. But that isn't the way the story ends. The boy has vanished, do you see? The girl is shut up in this mausoleum of a house, frightened, ashamed, overborne. There is to be a hospital experience, arranged with the discreetly horrified, discreetly helpful old family doctor——"

"And they would do it too!" Timothy breathed, now in his chair again, with his locked hands hanging between his knees and his eyes on his wife. "They would do it too!"

"My last scene—and this is the scene that I'm worried about," Isabel confessed, "is on the day when they are going to take the little girl to the hospital. One aunt has packed her bag, another has engaged two fine nurses; the limousine, with an old driver this time, is at the door. Grandma has succumbed under the blow, and the family friends hear that she has had a little return of her nervous breakdown. The uncles are all silent, watchful, determined that the blot on the family escutcheon shall be as quickly, as quietly as possible, wiped out. The old man, like a tiger on a short chain, is breathing through his nostrils while the insufferable details are dispatched; anything to have this thing behind them, to be walking impressively up the church aisle with the collection box again!

"Then the child, Ellen, speaks for almost the first time in the story," Isabel went on. "She sees the car waiting, she sees the stony faces, she doesn't know where her Dick is nor how to find him, and in one last frantic burst she begs for—life. She goes on her knees, she turns from one to another, she catches at her aunts' fingers—those cold, righteous, maidenly fingers.

"She sobs out that she isn't bad, she loves Dick, she loves her baby. Ah, please, please, they aren't to punish her little innocent baby! They've never had a baby in the house; she's always wanted one! He'll be hers —can't they see that? He'll be *theirs!* She doesn't want to go to the hospi-

tal and have Aunt Carrie's friends and Aunt Sallie's friends and Grandma's friends come in and see her and talk to her about appendicitis—she wants her little baby! Ah, please—he will be so cute! He will sit up in his high chair and blow those silly bubbles, as the babies do in the parks; he will have curls all over his little head! She's been bad, she knows that now, although she *didn't* know it—she had been so happy about Dick's loving her, until that night—that night was all wrong, they both knew it. They had worried about it, prayed about it, God knew how sorry, sorry, sorry they were! And as she sobs and stammers this out," said Isabel, "her face is soaked with tears. Wouldn't they *please* forgive her—let her go to Dick, let the baby come! Kings—kings had asked God for babies. Everybody couldn't have them! They were—why, babies were the world, after all. In a year or two he'd be in little ankle-strap slippers, he'd be toddling with his little head bobbing over trains and blocks! She *wanted* him so! They had told her that she could never marry now, that no decent man would want her now; she didn't mind that. But she had been dreaming of having her own baby in her arms. . . .

"And the story ends," Isabel said in a dead silence, her voice thick with tears, her cheeks washed by them, "by an aunt lifting her from her knees, and another aunt quietly opening the door, and a butler opening the big street door of the Judson house, and the old chauffeur opening the door of the limousine. And so life, and youth, and love . . . go out."

She stopped. There was absolute stillness in the library. Neither man moved his eyes from her for a long time.

Then Timothy cleared his throat and quite openly wiped his eyes and blew his nose. He stretched a hand for the manuscript, smiling unsteadily.

"Isabel, give it to me. I wouldn't trust you, or anybody, to touch it again. Leave it with me, I want to go over it. You have done it, my dear. It was worth waiting for!"

"Ah, Tim, you're not fooling me, after so many years?" her voice said wistfully. Peter saw that the whole thing had shaken her to the very soul. So potent had been the power of her words, her strangely vibrant, passionate tone, that he himself felt weak. He wondered if the world that would read Isabel's masterpiece would have even a faint shadow of the knowledge of what it was to hear it first in Isabel's voice.

"Peter," Timothy said, his voice still husky and his lashes wet, "is there anybody like her?"

"If you ask me," Peter said simply, "no."

The writer was eagerly handling the crumpled, written and rewritten pages. Isabel stood up. Peter, rising to go with her to the door, found himself invited, with one of her eloquent glances, to accompany her.

"Look at it, Tim," she said. "I'm going to show Peter your etchings." They left Timothy absorbed.

But in the hallways he felt that she had forgotten him. She stood outside the library door, silent, and constraining him to silence. She was

waiting for something perhaps. Her breath came unevenly, she gripped Peter's fingers in a cold hand, tapped the floor with one slipper.

Don came downstairs. Had she been waiting for Don? Peter looked at her expectantly, but she had no eyes for him. Her son came close to her, and she put one hand on his shoulder and raised her lovely face, white with a mother's love and a mother's anxiety, to the boy's grave, affectionate kiss.

"Remember how he's always loved you, always understood you, Don," she said in a whisper. "Go in, now, and talk to your father!"

BEAUTY IN LETTERS

"Let thanks be to Allah," says some character in a Kipling story, when old friends gather after long changes and separations in wartime, "that He has not terminated all the Delights!"

No, nor will He, while the miracle of beauty lives on and on, caged for us, captured for us, between the covers of beloved books.

Yesterday and today treat us cruelly, and we fear tomorrow. Life, although it takes us many years and many tears to discover it, life is only another name for death; they cannot exist independently. The child just born is already beginning the dull process of dying. Youth dies, physical perfection and beauty die, friendships die, love vanishes, vanity is mortally hit, pride goes down in the dust. The years bring us surprises increasingly painful; we marvel innocently at life's swiftness, its shortness, its unimportance, at our own ineffectual groping.

School-day agonies and fears, the teacher that laughed at us, the lost circus tickets,—are gone like a dream. The mating years are dim in the past, with the dance that was a failure, the invitation that did not come, the week-end that was one long triumph of fun and popularity. All gone. . . .

And gone the speculations and doubts of early marriage, not all good, not all bad; the first year, the first five, the first ten are over and done with. The endless months of waiting for the baby, the croupy nights, the threat of a neighboring lawsuit, the worry about the lost trunk and the mislaid deed, these have flown by like the slits in a zoetrope. Gray hair is no longer a joke, to be merrily explained away as premature, as characteristic in the family. Wrinkles, this time, are not going to disappear after a little rest and restored weight.

All this hurts and puzzles us extremely. If we are really to be so soon done for, we wonder what we were begun for, anyway. If stupid mistakes, made in ignorant youth, are to grow to great vines, and strangle us in middle life, then the game is not quite fair, we don't know the rules, we refuse to play with anything like the old enthusiasm.

Our mood becomes quieter, soberer, a little watchful, a little affronted. It is all too short, this delusion called living, too jumbled, too hurried. What we have won, putting youth and hope and courage and labor generously into the scales—what we have won wasn't worth winning. The real things have somehow escaped our eager fingers.

Baffled, we withdraw with dignity into the world of the mind. What success and money and fame refuse us, we can always find in those shady forests rich with sun and moon tracery, filled with exquisite

images, threaded with the moving figures of the great who have preceded us, who have stepped in between the covers of books.

For if, at the end of the saddest, the most disappointing and hurtful day, each one of us may come to a quiet room somewhere, and that room his own, if there is a light burning above white pillows, and a pile of books waiting under the light, then indeed we may still praise Allah, that He has not terminated all the Delights.

Even in a day reasonably full of service and occupation, friendship, movement through the busy streets, breakfast, lunch, dinner, telephone, a day full of everyday fatigues and interests, there is no moment comparable to this one, that finds the harassed spirit in blessed solitude, the tired body resting, the gypsy mind off to palms and lazy surf in Tahiti, or cresting the rough salty waves of some northern sea.

Beauty,—healing, miraculous, inexhaustible,—lives on in books, even when beauty elsewhere is dead. The clearing-house of the brain, the wings of the spirit, books lift us away from the petty, crowded day's smallness and entanglement. Trifles no longer concern us,—with Plague stalking in London Town, or Caponsacchi and Pompilia leaving Rome in sunset light. We must accompany our friends through greater crises than our lives will ever know, and when we leave them our own sense of balance and proportion is once more restored.

The actual Bay of Naples may lose something of its charm for the arriving traveler; he has trunks, checks, and hotel reservations on his mind, at best. At worst he adds to these anxieties a natural concern for his missing overcoat,—could he have left it at the Palermo hotel?—a faint consciousness that too much auction bridge has brought back the eye-strain, and a humiliated conviction that he has overtipped those stewards again. Perhaps the sky is clouding over ominously, perhaps Vesuvius is not acting in a way to please a hurried visitor; the volcano was infinitely more thrilling last week, and may be even better yet next month. Perhaps some member of the party has enthusiastically allied us with those awful Scotts, from Detroit, for the Pompeiian expedition tomorrow.

Even Barbadoes harbor—Barbadoes, on a still, silky-blue June morning!—may be completely spoiled by a murmuring steamer-acquaintance at one's ear. The woman who was heard saying loudly, in a pianissimo passage, at the opera, "We fry ours in lard!" is a traveler, too, as well as a music-lover. The golf fiend travels, the divorced woman with a grievance travels, the woman who collected funds for the new community club building travels.

But none of these, on a winter evening at home, can penetrate into the pages of De Quincey and Field Marshal Roberts; their voices cannot break the exquisite solitude in which Shelley heard a skylark, or a melon-flower took one rugged old poet's heart back to spring in England.

Books better than reality?—Yes, I think so. In some cases they are, anyway. Perhaps certain tourists in London love it more than we love

it who found London years ago, in the pages of Thackeray and Fielding and the Kingsleys and Sterne. Perhaps they get from the modern, electric-lighted, much-motored London of today, with its chocolate signs and its movies, its clean pavements and twinkling teashop windows, more than we got from the London of books. But I doubt it. Ours was the truer, the realer London, who read about it when we were young, years and years and years ago, and who threaded its dark and dirty streets hand in hand with the magicians who wrote the books we loved.

We knew the mysterious Thames as they can never know it who look down upon it from the safe warm dining rooms of the Cecil or the Savoy; we saw it grim and menacing, the sinister lights of coffee houses and pubs shedding an eerie glow upon it, strange characters oaring to and fro upon its tides; we spoke of the Strand and the Marshalsea and Limehouse as familiarly as their inhabitants ever did.

To be lying, at fifteen, in a field of California oats and poppies, and at the same time to be fingering frugal pennies for the purchase of fried fish at a smoky stall in the Old Roman Road, or to be bumping in a tumbril through the streets of eighteenth-century Paris, is to be part of a magic that the most fortunate tourist in the world can never know.

The lover of books is a miner, searching for gold all his life long. He finds his nuggets, his heart leaps in his breast; he cannot believe in his good fortune. Traversing a slow page, to come upon a lode of the pure shining metal is to exult inwardly for greedy hours. It belongs to no one else; it is not interchangeable.

"Ha!" says the reader involuntarily, as one struck. A casual bystander may ask what stirs him.

"Nothing. Only this is—some of this is good," he mumbles grudgingly. He is immersed again.

But to find beauty in great books is an art. It must be cultivated, like all the arts. Every second-hand bookstore contains a million raptures. But only one out of every five hundred persons ever thinks of going into a second-hand bookshop, and only one out of every score of those knows what he wants, and how to find it.

The violinist, the astronomer, the doctor are resigned to days, months, years of patient study, to endless effort and experiment. They know that they must dig deep into the hard, resisting earth before the crystal waters of any art will begin to flow. They must suspect, surmise, hypothecate. What part of their work these laborers can do easily, in the beginning, they soon learn to despise, they cast it aside. For years they must do what they do not like, must persist in what is difficult and thankless.

We all see that, for them. But what we do not see is that book-reading is a fine art, too, perhaps the highest and finest of them all; we do not arrive at its perfection overnight. Thoreau's *Walden,* Emerson's *Essays* we know must be good, because they are being eternally republished in the little leather classics; and then there are always the *Iliad,* and *Paradise Lost,* and Dante, books we have always meant to read.

But *Murder in a Nunnery*—incidentally, one of the best of its type—is certain to be easier reading. People are talking about it, too, and who ever hears any talk nowadays about Homer or Milton?

And after the *Murder in a Nunnery* there is always the cross-word puzzle in the evening paper, or a not-too-imbecile movie around the corner.

Thus we stroll comfortably through the shallows under which lies the lode of pure gold.

Gold it is. To buy a neat new book, *Excerpts from Shakespeare,* is sacrilege, and whoso does it is repaid by nothing but boredom.

But to read steadily through the Tragedies and come legitimately upon—well, say that matchless page in which fatuous old Pandarus stands with Cressida watching the return of the Roman warriors, is to taste Delight indeed. Henry Percy provokingly baiting his pompous uncle, or the exquisite Cleopatra turning valet when Anthony arms for the wars, these are more alive at this moment than many of the living folk with whom we have talked in the course of the day. Your true Shakespeare lover cannot read certain of these pages continuously. He must shut the book now and then, and stare into space a moment, recovering his breath.

And like the aviator, he must have his hundred hours of daring the blue before he feels his wings secure beneath and about him.

One must know all of Emily Dickinson, to begin to glimpse the faint little vanishing drift of woodsmoke that really was Emily Dickinson. The shyness of her, the boldness of her, the flaming joy and agony of her love, the cloistered years when bashful glasses of her currant jelly, each with its diamond verse, were all that even her closest and dearest knew of her, these are not to be captured by any casual eye.

"Parting is all we know of Heaven, and all we need of Hell," says this most authentic of all our poets' voices. And of great grief she gives us a matchless line: "some losses are so great, we measure them by gain!"

Ringleted, hoop-skirted little New England spinster, "disappointed in love," who else ever captured for us, as you have done, the heart-breaking beauty of the reluctant northern seasons, matching some other mystical seasons in your own being?

Who else ever longed "for a bee's experience of clovers and of noon," or set November in eight lines? These lines:

"The sky is low, the clouds are mean,
A traveling flake of snow
Across a barn or through a rut
Debates if it will go.
A narrow wind complains all day
How someone treated him;
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
Without her diadem."

In response to a letter praising her work,—work which only once or twice in her lifetime she permitted other eyes than her own to see—Emily Dickinson ends a breathless answer with a spontaneous burst of verse.

". . . as if I asked the Orient
Had it for me a morn?
And it should ope its purple gates
And shatter me with dawn!"

she writes, shattering us completely with her own more subtle dawn.

And all this—this "music that is too grievous of the height for safe and low delight," brings us to the almost unbearable climax, the last flying message of all, when her bewildered child-heart had somehow stumbled through all the green, still Junes, and all the snowy Novembers, to the end, and when she penciled to two girl nieces who loved her only the two words: "Called back!"

One closes the book, and goes out into the bright commonplace daylight dazed and hurt. Emily Dickinson is dead.

Equally, it is necessary, it is imperative, to read every word of Strachey's *Queen Victoria* to get the value, to appreciate the sheer beauty and daring and imagination of that final passage that paints the failing old monarch who is about to close her eyes on England, remembering—remembering the days of her power and glory. Remembering her great ministers, and her widowhood, and going back beyond that to Albert's nearness and dearness, Albert's help close beside her when the world was rocked with battles, with international problems. And beyond that again to youth—the first adored baby—"this first wonderful year of my reign," and a royal girlhood at Canterbury, and poor Uncle Willie's failing health—and so to the Archbishop, upon his knees in the cool summer morning, and the sheltered, German-governessed childhood, "and some friendly flounces of sprigged muslin, and the trees and grass at Kensington."

These discoveries, these joys, naturally, are not for the skimmer. What is Steerforth to him, or he to Steerforth? He has not followed David through that lonely cheated childhood into his first rush of hero-worshipping friendship. He has not flushed, as David must have flushed, with shame and pleasure, under Steerforth's negligent, "Why, you are a very Daisy!" His eyes are dry, when David says good-by to his sleeping friend, in one of those passages that will save Dickens for us when Thackeray and Scott are forgotten.

"Never again, oh, Steerforth, Steerforth, to touch that passive hand in love and friendship,—never, never more!"

How many thousand pages of Dickens, you lovers of the greatest English novelist of them all, how many thousand pages had we read,

slowly, savoringly, before we came to the tea party on Rumpty's perch, with Rumpty himself running eagerly for another pint of milk, another threepenny loaf, and with lovely, gracious, whimsical, maddening Bella making love to her wistful little drudge of a father, on an office window seat? How long were we faithful to Dickens before Tulkinghorn came down to Sir Leicester's seat in Lincolnshire and trapped Lady Deadlock in her own past?

"Of remorse, of explanation," says Lady Deadlock, beautiful, stricken, cold, in her exquisite robes, in the exquisite moonlight, "I say nothing to you. If I were not dumb, you must be deaf to any such words from me!"

When Dick Swiveller begins to reward the Marchioness's ridiculous devotion with his careless love, when Sydney Carton plays a certain game of cards, when little Paul—so small and weak and uninterested at the school party!—goes down to the healing seashore with Florence—ah, what heart-stopping, what heart-filling moments a reader knows! What oases in the long, dry search across the sands.

It was not for the skimmer that William Stirling wrote his all too-scanty pages, that Tomlinson conquered sea and jungle as Balboa never conquered them, that Stevenson fared forth on donkey back.

The skimmer laughs at Mark Twain. Mark Twain was the great humorist, one must laugh at him. That is enough for the skimmer.

But the children of the Kingdom of Books know that sweeter than any laughter it is to find, among the highways and byways of Clemens's more than two hundred tales, those things that do not make for laughter, those direct and poignantly touching passages that reach the source of tears instead. They are everywhere. They are in *Tom Sawyer* and in *Huckleberry Finn*, sudden flashes of surpassing sorrowful beauty and truth, sudden revelations of something deeper than mirth.

For sure and heart-breaking beauty, read into their own particular tale, I know nothing more telling in all Mark Twain's work than a sentence or two in an insignificant story supposedly funny; the name is something like "Every Man His Own Courier," and the tone, at the beginning, anyway, hilarious. But presently Mark gets into deep water, loses tickets, mislays umbrella, forgets time-table, returns to the trusting women at the hotel confessedly inefficient.

And it is then that he defines for us, in a few simple, infinitely pathetic words, that weakness that we all feel for the praise of those we love, our confusion and shame, our shallow, pitiful bravado when we fail them. Nobody else who ever lived could have written those phrases—not as he wrote them. And reading that story, one muses, "Fun may have made him popular. But the heart that dictated that passage made him great."

To the reader who "can't get into" the Russian novels, and who "read a part of" this or that by Tolstoi, how could one possibly describe the thrill with which one shares a certain hot summer morning with a puz-

zled, gentle, rural landowner, following the plow over the rich earthy furrows, listening to the peasants' talk, and finally stooping to drink from a dipper "filled with clear warm spring water, in which bits of grass and leaves were floating"? Detached, this means nothing. But discovered inadvertently, as the simple hero discovered it, when his troubled heart was so much in need of nature's healing, it makes one once more a child, one with the beauty and bigness of a summer field.

There is a talk, in Anna's bedroom at night, in that same story, between the beautiful Madame Karénina and her drab little sister-in-law, that is like the turning of a searchlight upon the hearts not only of those two women but of all women. Yet it is an insignificant talk, during which the older, plainer woman is miserably conscious of her own virtuous nightgown, high and tucked and practical and coarse, and of Anna's thrillingly fragile finery. One wants to tear the pages to minute pieces and put them under the microscope, determined to drag from them the secret of their power.

How many written words did the old Russian master destroy before he wrote that scene to his liking? How many seas did Balboa sail? "What of the way to the end?" asks Robert Browning. We neither know nor care, as long as it is ours to share the treasure they found at the foot of the rainbow.

And speaking of Browning, the lover of beautiful words who is not at home in the "wonder and the wild desire" of him knoweth not bad from good. To quote the words "a ring without a posy, and that ring mine?" is to quote nothing. But to find them, written into the text through which that great broken heart was struggling somehow to recapture its "lyric love," its "half-angel and half-bird," is to share with him something of the agony and the ecstasy that found in the end perhaps the most exquisite "posy" of all that ever went into any fortunate woman's love-ring.

"A ring without a posy, and that ring mine?"

If Browning had never written "One Word More," the world of words in matchless combination would have been the poorer. Greater than any of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry is the poetry she inspired in him. To her, as his "moon of poets," he points out that Raphael, "Raphael of the dear Madonnas," wrote one sonnet, to the woman he loved, and that when Dante loved he changed his art, too, for the beloved woman, and painted her a picture.

"You and I," says Browning to his wife—

"You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted with the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?—than read a fresh Inferno."

Simple, simple words, as simple as Ruth in tears amid the alien corn, as simple as Louise Imogen Guiney's shower-stricken earth, and earth-

colored streams. But for all their artless simplicity we cannot analyze or fathom them.

—And they are such legions! They are hiding everywhere, beautiful, unforgettable phrases, pages of exquisite description in Stevenson and Morris, pages in Conrad and Henley. There is the hot, shining summer sunset in *Adam Bede,* when Hetty lingers with Adam among the currant bushes, and supper is waiting in the cool, deep-silled kitchen of the Poyser farm, there are all the prim New England ways of Sarah Orne Jewett, with the sea shining at the end of every crooked little hollyhock-lined, maple-shaded street. There are a thousand lines of incomparable clarity in any one of a dozen of Hudson's books—notably in a child's memories of Argentina, of the pampas country, the book he called *Far Away and Long Ago;* there are sunsets in Hardy's books, and sunrises, there is a stark, pure loveliness about Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* that makes even a dour Scotch parsonage and a family of unbalanced and badly nourished spinsters seem enchanting.

But how choose scores, among so many hundreds, and how express, in any case, the debt we owe them, and the mystery of their straining—their great need to say what they said just as they said it?

Kipling expresses it, expresses the unattainable ideal of them all, little and big, when he says, of the Perfect Vision,

"Thy face is far from this our war,
Our call and counter-cry,
I shall not find Thee quick and kind,
Nor know Thee till I die.
Enough for me in dreams to see
And touch Thy garment's hem;
Thy feet have trod so near to God
I may not follow them."

And as we rise to the heights, in all humility we learn this. We may not follow. The path leads straight away from this little world,—up, up to the stars.

" 'Tis to have drunk too well the drink that is divine," says Francis Thompson, complaining, in words that are themselves immortal in beauty, of the "mystic wall of strange felicity, the incredible excess of unsensed sweet."

" 'Tis to have drunk too well the drink that is divine, maketh the kind earth waste, and life intolerable."

Our own American poet, Edna St Vincent Millay, says it not less well, in half-a-dozen wonderful lines about early spring in New England.

"I had forgotten how the frogs would sound
After a year of silence, or I think

I would not thus have ventured forth alone
At dusk, upon this unfrequented road.
I am beset by Beauty. Who will stand
Between me and the crying of the frogs . . . ?"

To anyone who has ever walked a twilight road, in that chill sweet hush that comes over the world in April, before even the willows are green, but after the brooks start rushing, there is something higher than mortal glory in such words, the written page holds more of young spring than even the fields and meadows do. Who will stand between us and this devastating pen, indeed?

Greatest of all, simplest of all, come with splitting light and force the phrases of the Carpenter. Caught by the ears of peasants, filtered through their slow pens, we still must shade our eyes away from them, even after two thousand years:

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they labor not, neither do they spin. . . ."
"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone. . . ."
"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. . . ."
"I will arise, and will go to my father, and say unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not worthy to be called thy son."

What would our life, our civilization, be without these words, and words like these? It would be the life and civilization of animals in a jungle, or cows grazing endlessly in a field. Animals never cry, or laugh, or dream of anything but clover tops and tree shade. Animals never joke; theirs is but a brief knowledge of grief. The cat that loses her kittens, the cow that loses her calf—these cry for a few hours, and eat, and forget.

They feel no kinship with Tennyson, watching the gray seas break on an English coast, or with the father of "W.V.," who made a radiant little daughter's short life only a little less exquisite than her death. Without David's grief for his "little lad," and the thousand songs and sonnets that it has inspired, we should have lost one of our permanent heritages.

Our lives are quick with more and more intensified emotions. We do more than our forbears did, see more, feel more. Above all, we love more; the harsh father, the cruel stepmother and uncles, the scornful and jealous sisters of the fairy tales and the old novels are vanishing from our midst. Even to the criminal, even to the nameless, superfluous baby of the slums, our concern, our affection goes out, in a way that was never dreamed in Dante's or in Shakespeare's day, or even in Dickens's time.

And in our quickened lives we need more and more the guidance and sustenance of inspired words. They show us how to live.

As for dying—who could die unchanged and untouched, who could

die afraid, if in a rambling lifetime of reading he had chanced upon "Ber Ezra" or "Prospice," if he had found those pages in Jowett that tell how Socrates died? The fear of death fades—it dies away—under the con templation of that death that was life itself, and those strange, living words, "Into Thy hands, O Father, I commend my spirit."

A life-term in any prison—the prison of illness, or poverty, or hum drum petty routine—holds no terrors, holds rather a promise, for the lover of true books. He knows that Keats and Shelley, Newman and Dryden and Emerson and Thoreau and Browne and a thousand others have yielded unto him only a tithe of their sweetness; from one stou volume of Whitman or Wordsworth he will gather enough honey to make bearable even the hardest sentence, for his sixty or seventy years —even the dullest.

Life without books would be, to him, the only real prison. Books are the stairs by which his years and his soul must mount,—from *Nick Carter* and *Little Women* to Dickens and Tennyson,—on through the biographies, the histories, the essays. And so to poetry, and so to mysti cism, and so up—up—up from the shadow of living into the light.

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